

The Rise and Fall of Militant Interracial Solidarity on the Milwaukee Waterfront, 1934-1942

By

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Dedication

For my parents.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This work aims to contribute to sociological understanding of the interaction between race and class in the United States through a theoretically grounded historical interpretation of a single case: Local 815 of the International Longshoremen's Association in Milwaukee, from its re-foundation as a radical force on the docks in 1934 to its turn to business unionism by 1943.

1. Research questions

The question at the core of this study is this: What accounts for the general failure of unions in the US to maintain a tradition of militant, interracial solidarity, and what are the implications of that failure?

This question, of course, towers over a vast literature. Like anyone else, I hope to get some purchase on the problem by whittling the question to fit a particular time and place. This study, then, aims to answer the following specific questions. First, what was the basis for the emergence of the ILA 815 as a union characterized by highly militant interracial solidarity among workers, with a sharply adversarial approach to collective bargaining under a radical black leader? Second, how did the local transform from one with these features to one instead characterized by conciliation with employers under an anti-radical white leader? Finally, what are the general theoretical implications for the question of the race-class interconnection?

Other questions, for which this single-case study can only provide very suggestive and provisional insights, are dealt with in the conclusion of this work. How can the dynamics at work in the ILA 815 help us to understand the development of racial politics in Milwaukee into the postwar era, including the character of the civil rights movement in the city? Secondly, what does the case suggest for an understanding of the rise of the New Deal-Cold War historical bloc in the United States, especially as

concerns the role of Labor and the question of race?¹ Given the very narrow purview of this study – a single union local in one city over the span a few years – it would be foolhardy to attempt firm conclusions about the historical development of the civil rights movement in Milwaukee or the establishment of a whole national hegemonic social formation. I leave these as hypotheses for which I try to establish some *prima facie* plausibility.

2. Motivation

The question posed above is different from those I had when I was in the very beginning stages of developing a dissertation. At that point, having encountered various sociological explanations for racial intraclass conflict, I was interested to contribute to filling a gap in the literature when it came to explanations for the *success* of interracial solidarity rather than its failure. Boswell et al. captured the basic motivation this way: "A unified theory of race relations should explain both conflict and solidarity, the Janus faces of racial interaction".²

As I undertook the research, I found three things awkward about this framing against the history of interracial working-class formation and the specific case of longshoremen and Local 815. First, the term "solidarity" describes a wide variety of social arrangements which cannot always be taken to be

¹ The language "historical bloc" comes from the work of Antonio Gramsci. It is easy to get bogged down in conceptual clarification when it comes to Gramsci, and there is a whole cottage industry which has grown up to interpret his oeuvre. I do not wish to engage it. In this note I just wish to offer the "original" usages for reference, before offering a practical definition below. All page numbers taken from Hoare and Smith's standard edition of selections of Gramsci's prison notebooks (1971). The basic proposition, situated in Marxist terminology: "Structures and superstructures form an 'historical bloc'. That is to say the complex, contradictory and discordant ensemble of the superstructures is the reflection of the ensemble of the social relations of production" (366). For the historical bloc as a terrain of political ideology and action rooted in material social relations, see 365-66. Regarding the centrality of national unity and the meaning of "representation" of the ruled within a historical bloc, see 418. On the conjunctural character of historical blocs, their delimitation of the realm of perceived possibilities, and their necessary preoccupation with specific projects in the formation and expression of a collective will, see 359-360.

² Terry Boswell et al., *Racial Competition and Class Solidarity* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007), 2.

instances of the same phenomenon. For example, the biracial unionism found among Gulf Coast dockworkers clearly embodied Jim Crow norms in the formal segregation of white from black workers. In most cases, such "Jim Crow unionism" entailed a subordination of black workers to their white counterparts; yet in the Gulf ports, the arrangement often conferred real power to black workers on the job and in the union.³ Likewise, an integrated union may be one in which black workers are accorded real power, or one in which formal integration masks the mothballing of black workers' concerns – or, as was often the case, something in between. Moreover, as far as workers' subjective stances, solidarity may be offered enthusiastically or provisionally; it may even be extracted by cunning or official discipline.⁴ The crucial point is that we cannot assume that all these different configurations share a single set of causes and conditions, entail similar experiences for the subjects involved across cases, or have similar longer-term prospects or effects.

Second, and relatedly, *durability* might be considered a relevant axis of variation not captured by the conflict/solidarity classification. Let us say we overcome the problem identified above, having developed a suitable method for identifying genuine or good-enough solidarity as opposed to sham solidarity, and exclude the latter cases. It will still be found that some of the bona fide cases will be durable while others are fragile. Some may last and establish something like living *traditions* of

³ Eric Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans: Race, Class, and Politics, 1863-1923* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Gilbert Mers, *Working the Waterfront: The Ups and Downs of a Rebel Longshoreman* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988).

⁴ For examples of an enthusiastic spirit of interracial solidarity, see, e.g., Michael Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights: Organizing Memphis Workers* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 93-144; Peter Cole, *Wobblies on the Waterfront: Interracial Unionism in Progressive-Era Philadelphia* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 31-73. One example of a more provisional form, sitting alongside outbreaks of racial conflict, might be southern miners in the Gilded Age: see, Daniel Letwin, *The Challenge of Interracial Solidarity: Alabama Coal Miners, 1878-1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 31-40. One use of clever tactics to coax interracial solidarity out of hesitant whites is described in Hosea Hudson, *Black Worker in the Deep South* (New York: International Publishers, 1972), 80-83. Finally, top-down enforcement of interracial solidarity was a notable feature of the United Packinghouse Workers of America: see, e.g., Rick Halpern and Roger Horowitz, *Meatpackers: An Oral History of Black Packinghouse Workers and Their Struggle for Racial and Economic Inequality* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1999), 101-118.

interracial solidarity over time; most are fleeting. What makes the difference? A "unified theory of race relations" not only requires an account of the *emergence* of solidarity and its various configurations, but also an account of how solidarity is reproduced, degrades over time, or shatters.

Third, the concept "interracial solidarity" in this framing usually describes something about *who* is involved in some class-formative project but does not describe *what* that project is. "Interracial solidarity" does not capture the full range of an organizing project's guiding principles, strategic choices, or ultimate aims. Put another way, the question of oppression and civil rights was (and is) far from the only political question confronting the labor movement, which factionalized and fractured along various other questions as well. The division between craft and industrial organizing traditions is arguably the defining feature of the internal history of US trade unionism for the first half of the twentieth century. The struggle between democratic impulses and bureaucratic tendencies in union organizations is also a central theme, right up to the present. We observe in history the distinct projects of "business unionism," a service orientation to union membership and a conciliatory posture toward management; militant rank-and-file unionism, a member-led, adversarial approach to expanding workers' control at the point of production that directly challenges management's right to rule the workplace; "social movement unionism," which aims to tie the union organization to broader political projects anywhere from the local to the international sphere; and various configurations between these and other types.⁵ The history of the labor movement is a history of warring philosophies of trade unionism; tensions between grand visions of economic democracy and the immediate constraints imposed by the laws of capitalist accumulation and of the state; the building of institutions and the struggles among factions to control and define them; bitter political rivalries. All are aspects of the broad "intra-class struggle within

⁵ Kim Scipes, "Trade Union Development and Racial Oppression in Chicago's Steel and Meatpacking Industries, 1933-1955" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois Chicago, 2003).

the class struggle," and all present organizational dilemmas and choices that interact with the question of interracial solidarity.⁶ Among competing coalitions and caucuses and parties and projects, none can claim a monopoly on the tradition of interracial unity; the impression made by black workers upon the organization of the working class was far too great to be expressed within a single tendency.

Here we come to the limitations of framing the motivation as the search for a "unified theory of race relations," and to the social-theoretical motivations of this dissertation. The "race relations" paradigm has taken a throttling by scholars over the past few decades, mainly on account of its tendency to naturalize and reify race – ultimately getting trapped in the ideology of race rather than explaining it.⁷ The analyst's path down the slippery slope to the ideology of race usually does not begin with a belief in biological or other essential distinctions among racial groups; indeed, they generally accept as axiomatic the notion that race is socially constructed. The slide begins instead with the abstraction of "race" from the totality of relations in the social formations in which it emerges and is reproduced, and the failure to apprehend race as a dynamic, not static, feature of those relations. It is, like class, in formation.⁸

The faces of Janus look not upon discrete outcomes (e.g., conflict or solidarity), but through time: one face points to the past, the paths taken and not taken; the other to the future, the set of possibilities fanning out from the present. The most promising attempts at constructing a theory of race have situated it in the mode of production within which it emerged and the specific concrete social

⁶ Judith Stepan-Norris and Maurice Zeitlin, *Left Out: Reds and America's Industrial Unions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 20.

⁷ See, e.g., Robert Miles, *Racism After 'Race Relations'* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 1-24; Karen E. Fields and Barbara J. Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (New York: Verso, 2014), 145-148.

⁸ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 55-61. The relationship between racial groups can, of course, be stable for considerable duration, but a *stable* relation must not be confused for a *static* one. Stability is itself a dynamic process, in the sense that the stable relationship in question must be constantly reproduced by way of some mechanism, or a set of mechanisms.

formations in which it persists, and they have understood race in terms of the ongoing *processes* by which it is reproduced or transformed. This theory must be pitched at quite a high level in order to integrate the extraordinary empirical complexity of interracial interactions, only a sample of which is indicated above. I believe that this integration is what the Racial Capitalism paradigm (hereafter simply RC) aims to capture when it emphasizes the historical co-development of racial ideology and capitalism on a global scale, both of which transform-while-preserving the ideologies and relations of production characteristic of pre-capitalist social formations.⁹

Growing interest in RC bodes well for the development of an interdisciplinary and internationalist research program on the nature of racial oppression in capitalist societies. One aim of this dissertation is to critically engage with RC, describing the causal structure of the framework and suggesting a schematic model of determination. This will help to clarify the various empirical questions that such a research program would entail and may help to facilitate a theoretical integration of different research projects. The case of the ILA 815 is presented as an example of a few of the essential linkages within the broader model between class structure, class formation, and the racial order.

This is the contribution I hope to make on the terrain of social theory. In a more empirical vein, I hope to contribute toward filling a gap in the history and sociology of longshoremen's unionism in the United States. From this angle, the key reference is not debates on interracial solidarity or RC, but Kimeldorf's standard standard-setting sociological study of longshoremen in the United States. His comparison of the Pacific and North Atlantic coast longshoremen's unions synthesizes much of the historical research that had been published to that point, which itself mainly focused on those two

⁹ For scholarly progenitors who precede the framework's explicit articulation, see, e.g., Oliver Cromwell Cox, *Class, Caste, and Race: A Study in Social Dynamics* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1948; repr., New York: Monthly Review Press, 1959); Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1944). The framework's classic inaugural text is, of course, Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (London: Zed Press, 1983; repr., Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2000).

regions and largely overlooked the South Atlantic/Gulf Coast and the Great Lakes.¹⁰ The paucity of material on the Great Lakes longshoremen is particularly ironic, as it was they who founded the ILA and dominated its membership for the first decades of the organization's existence. The attention to the North Atlantic and the Pacific coasts is reasonable, however, considering the greater economic importance of these coasts in the 20th century, the predominating influence of the North Atlantic locals in the leadership of the ILA by the time of the Great Depression, and the history of the organizational split that formed the ILWU – perhaps as near an opposite to the ILA as the conjuncture could have produced – on the Pacific Coast. Yet the preliminary foray into Great Lakes longshoremen's unionism pursued here suggests that the addition of the Great Lakes region into the comparison could bear fruit. In Chapter 3 I elaborate this comparison further.

Finally, I originally came to this topic thanks to personal experiences as a member of the leadership group of the labor union of graduate employees at UW-Madison from 2011 to 2016. These years contained the "Wisconsin Uprising" and its total defeat, the passage of "right-to-work" legislation in the state, and an intense period of mobilization during the first wave of the Black Lives Matter movement especially after the murder of Tony Robinson by Madison police in early 2015. In that capacity I witnessed up close the incapacity of top-heavy service-oriented unions to defend the legal and political conditions that helped to ensure their own existence, alongside the almost total disarticulation of the local labor movement with black movement organizations. This latter feature was dramatically put on display again with the massive 2020 wave of the BLM movement in the wake of the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis. These circumstances – Labor's isolation from social movements, and its internal institutional decay – can be found all over the country. I came to see the two as closely

¹⁰ Howard Kimeldorf, *Reds or Rackets?: The Making of Radical and Conservative Unions on the Waterfront* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

interrelated problems, as many others had already well understood, including some of the subjects of this study. Finally, therefore, it is my hope that the arguments contained herein can convince activists in the US of two things: first, that building militant working-class organizations that can contend for control over workplaces and labor markets is central to the struggle against racism; and second, that the independent movements of black and other oppressed people – independent, that is, of the leadership of majority-white institutions such as labor unions or reformist and radical parties – and the development of movement leadership within the oppressed sections of the working class, are central to the struggle for working-class power.

3. Hypotheses

3.1. The rise of solidarity

What accounts for the rise of ILA 815 as a radical interracial working-class formation? First, the conditions tending to aggravate interracial *conflict* were fairly weak in Milwaukee, and especially on the Milwaukee waterfront at the time. While there was considerable labor market discrimination against black workers, there were not intense split labor market dynamics.¹¹ Among the longshoremen, the predominating racial wage trend was overlap rather than split. The city's black population and labor force was small, and even shrinking in the Thirties, minimizing any sense of group threat. Milwaukee was a secondary destination city for the Great Migration, its black population not growing rapidly until

¹¹ For the split labor market concept, see: Edna Bonacich, "A Theory of Ethnic Antagonism: The Split Labor Market," *American Sociological Review* 37, no. 5 (1972): 549. For an application of the concept to the question of interracial unionism, see: Cliff Brown and Terry E. Boswell, "Strikebreaking or Solidarity in the Great Steel Strike of 1919: A Split Labor Market, Game-Theoretic, and QCA Analysis," *American Journal of Sociology* 100, no. 6 (1995): 1510. Brown and Boswell expand the model to include city size and extent of local repression.

the postwar period, and race relations there were less established than in places like Chicago, even if convergent patterns were already visible.¹²

Second, political conditions were conducive to black organizing, both in independent and interracial modes. The concentration of the black community in the Sixth Ward presented opportunities for black residents to contest for office on an independent basis, consistent with the theory that certain patterns of residential segregation can enhance the likelihood of interracial labor movement activity.¹³ black activists could also pursue interracial cooperation in the political sphere through multiple avenues: the Republican Party, which was the traditional route; the Socialist Party, and later the Socialist-Progressive fusion projects, to which some Milwaukee Garveyites gravitated; and the Communist Party, which was the only majority-white party organization to make a concerted effort to recruit in the black community. The CIO's explosion onto the scene also presented opportunities for interracial working-class organization that were essentially without precedent for at least a generation. Internal splits along class lines in the black community meant that there were no guarantees that black elites would be receptive to working-class civic leadership nor that black working-class leaders would turn to elites or accept their wisdom as they sought to deal with the problems faced by their own constituents. Not least of all, extraordinary black leadership was present on the waterfront and helped to initiate the effort. Chapters 3 and 4 explore these two factors.

Third, while some aspects of the structure and market conditions of the Great Lakes shipping industry would ultimately hinder the project of a militant class formation on the Milwaukee waterfront – especially the centralization of capital among the shipping companies themselves, as elaborated in the

¹² Joe W. Trotter, Jr., *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-45* (Urbana: UIUC Press, 1985). For the classic statement of the “group threat” theory of racial conflict, see Hubert M. Blalock, *Toward a Theory of Minority-Group Relations* (New York: Wiley, 1967).

¹³ Joseph Gerteis, *Class and the Color Line: Interracial Class Coalition in the Knights of Labor and the Populist Movement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

next section – the fragmentation and disorganization of the stevedores and warehouse owners, who employed the longshoremen directly, represented an opportunity for union radicals. The absence of effective coordination among the waterfront employers made it easier for the local to pick off employers, as it were, one-by-one. From the companies’ perspective, agreeing to a contract and ending a strike could get their operation back online while competitors still had their business held up; from the local’s perspective, each caved employer made it easier to keep up the strike against the holdouts. Decreased freight rates and a drop in lake shipping during the Depression years heightened employers’ vulnerability to work stoppages. The proof of militant tactics was in the pudding of the local’s quick success in winning recognition, wage increases, and improvements in conditions. This is shown in the historical narrative of Local 815 presented in Chapters 6 and 7.

3.2. The local’s transformation

What caused the ILA 815’s transformation from radical interracial unionism to business unionism? Put less passively, how did the conservatives win leadership of the local from the radicals, and what did they do with it?¹⁴ I argue that there are three elements essential to understanding the episode: the structure of class relations in the Great Lakes shipping industry and on the Milwaukee waterfront, the organizational characteristics of the ILA, and the political struggles internal to the labor movement.

The most important distal cause of the failure of the radical leadership to maintain its position was the structure of class relations in the Great Lakes shipping industry, especially those features tending to intensify job competition between workers across ports. There were at least three such

¹⁴ Throughout, I refer to this group as “conservative” as opposed to the “radical” group. This follows the language used in the sympathetic profile of Local 815 leader John Brzek by Robert Chybowski (1977), and is used as shorthand to refer to the faction within the local that was anticommunist and in favor of collaborative relations with employers. They should not be understood as conservative in the sense of, say, aligning with anti-New Deal forces.

features. First, technological change had already eliminated most of the longshoremen's jobs in the industry's most important commodities to a greater extent than on the other coasts, on account of the much greater dependence on bulk cargo which largely shipped in self-unloading vessels by the 1930s. Second, the package freight business was characterized by a high centralization of capital; a single company, the Great Lakes Transit Corporation, controlled virtually the entire interlake movement of package freight, the movement of which employed more men than the bulk commodities. Third, the industry suffered a general decline of waterborne trade in competition with the overland alternatives rail and trucking, especially, again, in the package freight trade.¹⁵ In addition to the loss of work to the self-unloaders, then, the upshot was excessive dependence on a single large employer whose size protected them from workers' organizing, but not from competition.

This brings us to the second major cause of the local's transformation: the organizational characteristics of the ILA. Aside from the structural features outlined above militating against cooperation across ports, two features are especially relevant. First, when workers reestablished the ILA on the Great Lakes in the 1930s, they did so with a strong ethos of local autonomy and suspicion of top-down control over negotiations between locals and their employers. Their desire for local autonomy

¹⁵ Package freight, also known as general cargo or break-bulk cargo, refers to goods that are sacked, bundled, boxed, barreled, or otherwise broken up into handleable units, or any manufactured goods handled individually. This differentiates it from bulk cargo such as petroleum, coal, grain and other such commodities that are dumped or pumped into storage silos or piles. It is also differentiated from goods shipped in intermodal containers, which are not individually unloaded. The terminology can be confusing for two reasons. One is that the kinds of goods shipped by railcar ferry are the same kinds of goods as general cargo, but because it is the railcar and not the packages that are manipulated, these goods are not classified as package freight. Second, in the context of the Great Lakes trade, "package freight" is used both in the way laid out above, while other times it refers more narrowly to miscellaneous cargoes carried on general cargo ships. This latter definition would exclude bagged cement and automobiles, each of which were shipped in special vessels designated for these commodities, rather than general cargo vessels – but both of which were formally classified by the Interstate Commerce Commission as package freight. The difference at play is whether "package freight" defines a good that must be handled in a particular way, or a good that is carried by a particular sort of ship, the package freighter. The former definition hinges on the labor involved; the latter on the capital involved. Following the more typical usage in my sources, I will adopt the latter, such that I use "package freight" and "general cargo" to refer to miscellaneous goods shipped on general cargo vessels AKA package freighters.

may have been rooted in longshoremen's previous experiences with organizational dictatorship by previous ILA international president T.V. O'Connor, but the tradition of localism also has deep roots in longshore unionism.¹⁶ Whatever the cause, it helps us to explain the persistence of the port-to-port fragmentation that acted as a major external constraint on the radical leadership of ILA 815, described above. It must be pointed out that the upshot here is not that the international could not intervene in local matters, but only that it did not attempt to pursue pattern bargaining in the region over the heads of locals that did not want it.

Moreover, while locals may have desired autonomy from supralocal levels of the organization, they could exhibit tremendous internal discipline and officials had wide-ranging authority. The specific mechanisms producing this arrangement will be discussed in a later chapter. For now, it will suffice to point out that this feature of the ILA 815 helps to account, ironically perhaps, for the stability of *both* the radical faction's leadership right up until it was weakened by employer threats in 1942, *and* the success of the conservative faction in rapidly securing its leadership with only negligible challenges for the subsequent three decades. Indeed, the new leadership, under the recommendation of the international leadership, also reformed the local in such a way as to reduce the role of rank-and-file leadership that could form the basis of an effective opposition later. In this way the organizational features of the ILA at its different levels play a complex part in the causal story: at the Great Lakes district level, there was fragmentation and competition among locals, which destabilized the radical leadership in 815; at the local level, there was a high level of discipline and official authority, which stabilized the radical leadership until it was overwhelmed by interport competition; at the international level, there was wide

¹⁶ Maud Russell, *Men Along the Shore* (New York: Brussel and Brussel, 1966); John R. Commons, "Types of American Labor Unions: The Longshoremen of the Great Lakes," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 20, no. 1 (1905): 79, 83.

latitude for officers to intervene on behalf of the conservative opposition. Finally, the formal organization of the local itself was not merely a background causal condition but an object of struggle between the contending factions.

This brings us to the last and proximate cause: the character of the struggle between contending factions. The motivations and aims of the factions themselves cannot be left out of a causal account. The fight within the ILA 815 was, in part, a microcosm of the much larger struggle within the labor movement over what ought to be its guiding vision and its organizational expression. The actual conflict within 815 was not simply expressed in the practical terms of who could best charm ships to port, but was cast as a high-stakes ideological and political battle. It was a matter of loyalty to the ILA and the AFL, against the splitters of the CIO; it was also a matter of loyalty to the United States and keeping the port safe from Communists and other subversives. It was only on such terms that the conservative group could seek to expel, rather than simply unseat, the incumbents and their allies. It was also on such terms that the direct intervention of the ILA international leadership was apparently warranted. Of course, these ideological lines in the sand were articulated to the immediate concerns of workers: a clean reputation for the Port of Milwaukee meant more ships, and more ships meant more work; employers did not have to suffer a troublesome union when more responsible unions at similar ports can be found. But the point is that the ideological conflicts within the labor movement, and more broadly the situation in Milwaukee, shaped the motivations and strategies of the actors involved. Chapter 5 presents a comparison of the two main figures in the history of the local, Aaron Toliver and John Brzek, that serve as an in-depth comparison of the two ideological visions competing for leadership among the waterfront workers.

To summarize: The long decline of package freight in competition with overland routes gave the GLTC an imperative to seek out lower labor costs; their near-monopoly on the lakewise package freight

trade gave them great power to do so. This drove the longshoremen – organized on a fragmented port-to-port basis – into intensifying competition, especially against the broader context of major advances in automation in the shipment and handling of the Great Lakes' most important commodities. From the port workforce's perspective, it meant that to antagonize the employer was to seriously risk losing their business to more compliant locals happy to take the work. The radical leadership faction of the ILA 815 was confronted with just such a threat, creating an opening for political opponents inside the local. This opposition, mobilizing anticommunist and countersubversive discourse, succeeded in taking the wheel, and in having the leadership of the left faction expelled permanently. At this point, the new leadership reformed the organization to enhance the authority of official leadership, already quite extensive, making a reversion to left-wing or radical leadership less likely. The leadership of the local would thereafter remain stable with little serious challenge for the next 30 years. In other words, the radical project in the ILA 815 was irrevocably defeated.

In the following section, I offer an historical interpretation I believe to be supported by this case. This interpretation will not receive specific treatment in its own chapter but will be integrated into the analysis and revisited in the conclusion. In section 4, I introduce the basic theoretical implications to be explored more fully in the final chapter.

3.3. Historical interpretation

At the level of interpretation, this case has implications for understanding the early period of the "long civil rights movement" and the formation of what in loosely Gramscian terms can be called the New Deal-Cold War historical bloc, or simply the anticommunist historical bloc.

The "long civil rights movement" refers to an historiographical claim advanced by Hall and others that seeks to reframe the Civil Rights era past its "classical" temporal and geographical

boundaries of the 1950s and 60s South.¹⁷ That shift also entails a reinterpretation of the social bases and reach of the struggle for civil rights, its motivations, and its ideological underpinnings. Here the periodization begins with the new conditions wrought by the Great Migration that began from the second decade of the 20th century, and which represented not only a movement from the South to the North and West, but also from mainly rural to urban life, and a transformation from an agrarian quasi-peasantry to an industrial proletariat. What emerged were mass political constituencies for civil rights, political representation, workplace rights, integration, and self-determination – these, of course, with their own internal inequalities and conflicts. One central element of this process was the growing layer of black working-class and intellectual leadership embedded in the organizational ecology of the labor movement and the "Old Left," and the rise of an interracial tradition of civil rights unionism and social democracy which did not tend to recognize boundaries between racial and economic.¹⁸ The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom of 1963, where Martin Luther King, Jr delivered his most well-known speech, represents perhaps the greatest public demonstration of that tradition. It is regrettably also an excellent case study in the nation's selective memory. Rarely remembered are the MOW's economic demands, especially for full employment. Of that momentous event the national memory preserves little more than a single line of a single speech. King's dream that his children may "live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character" has since been cynically conscripted into service for the right-wing attack on the affirmative state in general, and on the legal victories of the civil rights movement in particular.

¹⁷ Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History* 91 (2005), 1235.

¹⁸ Robert R. Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-twentieth Century South* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2003).

This alternate periodization of the civil rights movement changes the way we think about its relationship to other social movements and political developments. It especially complicates the common interpretation that the Cold War and anticommunism worked unambiguously to the advantage of the civil rights movement. If we look only at the "classical" civil rights movement, from *Brown v. Board* to the Voting Rights Act, there is little trouble: activists did succeed in mobilizing the nation's anxiety to maintain moral superiority over the Soviet Union, forcing America to confront the world it made in the South. Taking the longer view forces a serious revision. If we start from the New Deal era, we find a movement characterized less by churches and student organizations, and more by close networks of activists overlapping in the labor movement (the CIO unions especially), left-wing parties and issue groups, and black social and political organizations.

Here, anticommunism necessarily played a different role, decidedly less supportive to the civil rights struggle. Within the labor movement, it motivated a scorched-earth campaign against the labor movement left, culminating in the Taft-Hartley legislation and the expulsion of eleven "communist-dominated" international unions from the CIO, representing some 650,000 workers. This included some of the most important militant interracial unions, such as the United Farm Equipment Workers of America; the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers; the Food and Tobacco Workers; and the International Fur and Leather Workers Union. Most of the unions remaining in the CIO exhibited a declining appetite for confrontations over racial inequality at work – one among many casualties of the taming of radical trade union traditions. Within the Communist Party – not the only left-wing political party, but certainly the largest and most influential – the rising anticommunist atmosphere accelerated the already-present tendency to deprioritize the black struggle to expand its reach into the mainstream of American politics, with the result that many black party leaders, members, and fellow travelers either publicly repudiated the party or drifted away from it. Activists of the Popular Front – the name I will use

for the progressive, left and left-liberal, labor, and civil rights organizations that comprised the left wing of the New Deal coalition – who sought to avoid the isolation and repression of the anticommunist campaigns also put some distance between the party and themselves, and in some cases dropped or deprioritized economic demands, seeing the latter as opening oneself up to charges of communist sympathies.¹⁹ In short, the crescendo of anticommunist repression and the way it chilled the atmosphere of the broad liberal-left coalition forces tended to open "fissures within African American intellectual and political circles and forced black radicals on the defensive",²⁰ and "narrow[ed] the ideological ground on which civil rights activists could stand".²¹

This study supports Hall's basic interpretation that anticommunism and the ideological and political demands of the Cold War generally stymied the black freedom struggle by tending to foment division and conflict within and among the organizations and networks working toward civil rights, workers' rights, and a social democratic politics.²² Crucially, it is in this first phase – from the rise of the

¹⁹ The Communist Party's dizzying policy turns certainly worsened matters in this regard. When the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, or the Non-Aggression Pact between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, was signed in August 1939, it caught many allies, fellow travelers, and party members off guard. When the CPUSA adjusted their line to the Soviet policy, many party members were disillusioned and left, and such Popular Front organizations as the American League for Peace and Democracy essentially hollowed out. See Maurice Isserman, *Which Side Were You On?* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1982), 32-38.

²⁰ Robert O. Self, "The Black Panther Party and the Long Civil Rights Era," *In Search of the Black Panther Party*, ed. Jama Lazerow and Yohuru Williams (2006): 24, quoted in Robbie Lieberman and Clarence Lang, "Introduction", *Anticommunism and the African American Freedom Movement*, ed. Lieberman and Lang (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009): 4.

²¹ Hall, 1249.

²² Hall's interpretation both synthesized older historical research and inspired a spate of new studies on the matter of the relationship of the Left, the black struggle, and anticommunism in the mid-twentieth century. Just a small sampling: Gerald Horne, *Communist Front? The Civil Rights Congress, 1946-1956* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1988); Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Clarence Lang, *Grassroots at the Gateway: Class Politics and Black Freedom Struggle in St. Louis, 1936-75* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009); Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005). At least two other sociologists have written important dissertations in this vein: Matthew F. Nichter, "Rethinking the Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Radicals, Repression, and the Black Freedom Struggle" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2014); Richard Seymour, "Cold War Anticommunism and the Defence of White Supremacy in the Southern United States" (Ph.D. diss., London School of Economics, 2014).

New Deal in the Depression years to the rise of the post-war order in the late 1940s – that the most vital links between the black struggle, the trade union movement, and the radical left were severed, and a comparatively vacuous racial liberalism left in their place. If one wanted a single best explanation for the disarticulation of the labor movement from the black struggle in the postwar United States, the anticommunist campaign would at least be a candidate.

This process was part of a broader political development: the emergence of the anticommunist historical bloc. Footnote 1 above offers the original formulation of the concept; rather than enter a long engagement with these formulations, we might simply define it as a ruling class coalition whose domination over society is an aspect of capitalist economic relations, plus this coalition's more or less successful strategy for securing the consent of the ruled. In capitalist democracies, historical blocs must achieve a stable articulation of two inconsistent imperatives: first, maintain the broad conditions of profitability, which is to say rule in the interests of capitalists; second, be perceived as faithful representatives of the collective will and the interests of the *whole nation*, without regard to class distinctions. An historical bloc, then, is something like a political and economic regime, plus its broader social layers of ideologists, intellectuals, supporters, and abiders, organized in quite varied contexts outside of the institutions of the state as such – that is to say, in civil society. The historical bloc concept here is more apt than "regime" because it reaches down into these layers of civil society composed of masses of ordinary people of the sort at the heart of this study; and insists on the importance of dynamics of social action, including contradictory dynamics, within these layers, among these masses. It implies a process whereby thousands of little alignments in widely varied contexts – geographical, political, organizational – conspire to promote stability in an inherently unstable arrangement.

There can be no doubt that leading parties and intellectuals are involved in a great deal of "discursive" and ideological work, crude or clever, to direct the lines of discussion in certain ways. But an

historical bloc does not win consent by such methods alone, much less by crude propaganda or psychological trickery. Rather, consent rests on three bases. First, the stability of the historical bloc depends in large part on the extent to which the social order over which it presides *really does* satisfy the short- and medium-term interests of broad layers of society. Second, to the extent the social order falls short in the satisfaction of common interests, it must at least be seen as inevitable; alternative possibilities are closed off in the popular imagination. Third, and most pertinent to the present discussion, the historical bloc marshals the active participation or at least the assent of broad sections of the nation into some specific, concrete national project.²³

Cold War liberalism provided the essential center of gravity for such a project, unifying capital, the state, and civil society – labor unions, churches, political parties, ethnic lodges, veterans' groups, and so on – around a program of anticommunism and countersubversion on the one hand, and the growth of an affirmative capitalist state on the other. This project served simultaneously to mollify anti-New Deal right-wingers, to curb "excessive" demands for more radical redistributive policies while justifying domestic intervention in terms of the need to compete with the Soviet Union, to secure a de-escalation of industrial conflict, and to strike a certain compromise across the old sectional divide. To wit, the Northern section of the bloc – while pursuing, albeit haltingly, some civil rights policy at the national level, represented by, e.g., the Truman Administration's EO 9981 ending racial segregation of the military – continued to cede the right of its Southern section to carry on with one-party rule over its apartheid regime. Whatever discomfort Jim Crow might stir up for a Northern liberal, it was undoubtedly an effective bulwark against Communists and other radical agitators (who might all, at any

²³ The third principle is most uniquely "Gramscian". The other two are basically central to the sociology of authority, having been put forward by theorists of social change as dissimilar as Alexis de Tocqueville and Leon Trotsky (Stinchcombe 1978). For other useful formulations in the same vein see Therborn (1980) and Przeworski (1985).

rate, be accused of being Communists), and helped to maintain a low-wage haven for Northern capital within national boundaries. The segregationists – thoroughgoing anticommunists, of course – could oblige, accepting the basic terrain of the New Deal order, so long as the Northern liberals were willing to avoid a direct confrontation with American racism.

Finally, the most important point about historical blocs in advanced capitalist societies is that they do not represent the *elimination* of the social conflict immanent in relations of exploitation, domination, and competition, but only a temporary dampening or channeling of it. They are always "balancing acts." The rise of the CIO and the growing political clout of blacks in the Northern cities, of course, represented major sources of tension for this arrangement – indeed, the anticommunist project was in part motivated by the desire to contain precisely these forces. For that project to succeed, it meant that at least some significant proportion of organized workers and prominent left-wing intellectuals had to be won to it. Obviously, there would be cracks and fissures from the start running all the way through the period, but it would not be until the classical phase of the Civil Rights Movement that activists finally succeeded in wedging these cracks open to the breaking point by way of a new set of organizational vehicles, largely outside the labor movement, namely churches and campuses.

The story of the ILA 815 in Milwaukee ties these threads together. To be clear, the change that took place was not a deterioration into racial segregation or exclusion, nor a white backlash event. Indeed, Local 815 would almost have been among Milwaukee's most racially integrated institutions in the postwar period and certainly deserves credit for this distinction. Instead, the local underwent a political transformation such that it would no longer sustain active antiracist activity or other broader class-formative political projects. The purge of the local's left-wing leadership was motivated neither by racism nor the threat of black civil rights agitation, but by real fears among the rank-and-file of reduced employment, on the one hand, and by the anticommunism which gave these fears a legitimate political

and ideological articulation, on the other. The *effect* of this purge and subsequent restructuring, whatever the intentions of its agents, was to take militant rank-and-file unionism off the table and to foreclose on the potential the local had to develop and elevate black working-class leadership in the city.²⁴ The local's leadership would instead orient itself toward business unionism, becoming a partner to employers and the municipal government in the responsible stewardship of the city's port.²⁵ If much of the story about the historical weakness of civil rights unionism is racial segmentation of workplaces, white workers' hostility to their black coworkers, or outright racial exclusion from heavily unionized sectors, the ILA 815 suggests that another piece of it is the unions' turn away from struggle at the point of production even where these other causes are weak or absent.

3.4. Theoretical implications

I argue that an analysis of the ILA 815 in the years from 1934-43 offers insight into the general failure of labor movement organizations to develop durable solutions to the problem of racial division in the American working class. Typical explanations of the failure of interracial solidarity in the labor movement hinge on various dynamics characterized as specifically racial: the effects of racially split labor markets in generating racial conflict rooted in competition among workers for wages and

²⁴ Again, to invoke the "long civil rights" literature, anticommunist purges in the trade unions and the rise of a popular anticommunism had this effect in many other cases as well. As will be elaborated below, this dissertation uses a case that is *unique* relative to existing scholarly accounts as a lens to clarify what dynamics were *typical* of the historical development of the period.

²⁵ I wish to emphasize here again that this alignment often works because workers *actually do* get something out of it. The circumstances were such that the conservative faction really did seem to hold out stronger prospects for more stable earnings in longshore work. It is possible that the radical faction could only have held onto leadership at the cost of a sharp and perhaps permanent reduction of the labor force; at least, it may certainly have appeared that way at the time. The point is not that the conservative faction coerced the membership into accepting a new arrangement against their interests, in the manner of a palace coup at the union hall; it is rather that the members had some clear interest in accepting the new arrangement, *even with* the costs it entailed in terms of shopfloor power and political potential, especially as these costs were generally of a less tangible sort than the loss of a paycheck.

employment;²⁶ the overt divide-and-conquer strategies of employers through the purposeful racial segmentation of labor markets and "race-typing" of jobs within firms and industries;²⁷ the hold of white supremacist ideology on the leadership and rank-and-file of labor organizations;²⁸ or the attachment to the identity of whiteness and the psychic and material rewards it holds for Americans of European descent.²⁹ In contrast to these types of explanations, all of which begin with racial causes to explain the outcome of working-class disunity, the ILA 815 demonstrates how capitalist class dynamics *as such* – combined with plausible assumptions that human beings are somewhat rational, loss averse, and risk averse – represent an independent barrier to militant interracial class solidarity even without the intervention of any of these racial dynamics.³⁰ The basic elements of class dynamics – class structure/class location; class formation/class consciousness; class struggle/class practices – will be spelled out in more detail in Chapter 2, but I summarize briefly here.

First, the capitalist class structure has as one of its core features the competition among more or less atomized workers for employment and wages. Intra-class competition among workers may be more or less intense, given conjunctural industrial conditions, the business cycle, and state regulation of labor markets, but it is an omnipresent feature of the class structure. The "dull compulsion of economic

²⁶ Bonacich.

²⁷ David M. Gordon, Richard Edwards, and Michael Reich, *Segmented Work, Divided Workers: The Historical Transformation of Labor in the United States* (Cambridge: CUP, 1982), 100-164; Michael Reich, David M. Gordon, and Richard C. Edwards, "Dual Labor Markets: A Theory of Labor Market Segmentation," *The American Economic Review* 63, no. 2 (1973): 361.

²⁸ Michael Goldfield, "Class, Race, and Politics in the United States: White Supremacy as the Main Explanation for the Peculiarities of American Politics from Colonial Times to the Present," *Research in Political Economy* 12 (1990): 119.

²⁹ David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991).

³⁰ To my knowledge the most sophisticated and general argument for the tendency of capitalist not to homogenize, but to differentiate and fragment workers is still Howard Botwinick, *Persistent Inequalities: Wage Disparity Under Capitalist Competition* (Princeton: PUP, 1993; repr., Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2018). Michael McCarthy (2016) provides a clear and concise summary of the argument as it bears on the structure of race relations.

relations" – the fact that a worker needs money in short order and can only obtain it by finding a buyer for their labor-power – tend to undermine interracial working-class solidarity and the political struggles by actors within the working class to generate such solidarity, because they undermine solidarity *in general*, both across racial lines and within them. In a racially structured society, routine intraclass competition represents a barrier to effective anti-racist projects even without the intervention of additional racial dynamics.

Second, the class structure and the divisions and conflicts within it lay the basis for various forms of association – that is, various patterns of class *formation*. Workers form a great multitude of organizations in pursuit not of general class interests, but of the particularistic interests of their own faction within their class – defined, variously, by craft or occupation, ethnic or national community, workplace, or some other subdivision. These organizations, usually formed for the pursuit of distinct sectional interests (i.e., for some particular subset of workers), are created in concrete circumstances and determinate stages of capitalist development which shape their formal authority structure, decision-making strategies, and their general ethos.³¹ Once "up and running," workers' organizations act back upon the class structure – this, indeed, is their main purpose. As vehicles for shaping the class structure – which is to say, vehicles for class *struggle* – they themselves become arenas and objects of struggle among workers seeking to do so in various ways, some aiming to deepen and consolidate sectional or occupational advantages, others aiming to expand organization across such divisions. This, essentially, takes us from the problem of class *structure* to the problems of class *formation* and class *struggle*, and the mutual, but asymmetrical, determination of all three (and their three corresponding concepts at the micro-level: respectively, class location, class consciousness, and class practices).

³¹ Jerry Lembcke, *Capitalist Development and Class Capacities: Marxist Theory and Union Organization* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988).

Political struggles within working class organizations, and the ways that these organizations seek to affect the class structure, can have enormous impacts on the prospect of militant interracial organization, even where they are not directly motivated by and have no immediately obvious bearing on "race questions."

These claims are important less for their originality or novelty – indeed they had been articulated in various ways by the left intellectuals of the time and were expressed in the practice of thousands of union militants – than for their *emphasis* on capitalist class relations as a fundamental cause of the stable reproduction of racial division. To put a finer point on it, this paper suggests that racial inequality in the United States is reproduced not only by the everyday discursive practices that shore up racist views of the world; the various processes of socialization that train new generations in its sumptuary codes, rituals, and identities; the attempts by various actors to divide or exclude others on the basis of race for personal gain; or its coercive enforcement by the state through surveillance, policing, and incarceration. It is not that these phenomena are mere illusions, or that an investigation of these phenomena is irrelevant to an understanding of the American working class. Quite the contrary: they are essential for understanding the racial terrain inherited, so to speak, by each generation of workers. Rather, it is that such investigations ought not totally swamp an understanding, and indictment, of the way capitalist class relations tend to stabilize existing divisions, *even without the intentional intervention of capitalist elites, white workers, political power-seekers, or other groups.*

Historians and cultural theorists have been right to criticize orthodox Marxists for their sanguine expectations that working-class solidarity would emerge as an immanent tendency of capitalist class relations; to show that in all kinds of ways ideology, culture, and politics – and not the failure of workers to become rational that Marxists have named *false consciousness* – have been forceful countertendencies to class formation. They have also shown that, where class solidarity does emerge,

cultural change is at the heart of the explanation. But this line of critique drove the cultural theorists to bend the stick too far the other way: "structure" was now regarded only as an inert analytical construction of the researcher, not an active force in the social world, except insofar as structures are interpreted and given meaning by social agents themselves. The class structure, so goes the argument, does not itself *cause* anything – it is rather an *effect* of the rise of class cultures.³²

I, too, wish to offer a corrective to those Marxists who maintain a guileless faith in the dialectical unfolding of human history, for whom false consciousness represents the fundamental barrier to the millennium. But the culturalists have overdone it. It does not follow from the fact that social structures must be interpreted by people that structures have no importance independent of agents' interpretations. To the orthodox Marxists: shared class interests can be a basis for unity, but the reproduction of *divisions* (racial and otherwise) is immanent in capitalist class relations, whose dynamics can at best only offer the *potential* of overcoming them. To the culturalists: the provenance of these divisions as well as the basis for overcoming them is not only cultural, but also – and *ultimately* – structural.

These connections will be elaborated and posed more adequately in Chapter 2. In the following section, I briefly outline the methodological approach.

³² The best-known statement of this position comes from E.P. Thompson (1963), whose *The Making of the English Working Class* perhaps best represents the initiation of the "cultural turn" in labor studies: "I do not see class as a 'structure', nor even as a 'category', but as something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships.... Class is defined by men as they live their own history, and, in the end, this is its only definition" (9-11). Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1991) likewise held that there was no such thing as class as such, absent the consciousness of its agents *as* a class. A notion of class "structure" was, in his view, nothing but "classes on paper" (231-34). An analytical fiction, in other words, of no consequence for social life.

4. Methodology

In this paper, I use an in-depth case study of a single labor union local to highlight the relationship between race, class, and organization. The exceptional character of the case, at least as compared with existing literature, allows for the generation of insights into this relationship. A detailed case-study of a failed instance of militant interracial unionism allows us to pinpoint the critical moments in the history of the organization that generated that outcome, develop an understanding of the relevant features of the local context, and determine the key causal processes at work. In this section, I briefly outline what makes the ILA 815 an exceptional case. This discussion is cursory, as I will return to a fuller description of the case and its context in Chapter 3. Then, I justify the usefulness of a single case for the development of theory.

The ILA 815 is unusual, when compared against the existing literature on the American labor movement. It is *not* unusual in terms of its outcome, in that it represents an example of a failure of militant interracial unionism – there are many such cases. But it is unusual in two other relevant ways: within the broader context of the longshoremen’s unionism, and among well-known cases of the failure of militant interracial unionism.

The racial composition and the politics of 815 clearly mark it as unique within the ILA. First, it was racially integrated. While the ILA had no formal policy of exclusion, as many other AFL affiliates did, it always adapted itself to local racial conditions on the basis of expediency; this meant outright exclusion at some ports, and segregated locals in others (mainly in the South Atlantic and Gulf Coast districts). In Milwaukee, interestingly, this pragmatic approach entailed an integrated local. That a majority white membership repeatedly elected black officers, including a black president, is certainly noteworthy. There was no shortage of black leaders in the ILA, but apart from Milwaukee these men led segregated locals. Second, the local had left-wing leadership in one of the most famously conservative

international unions. The radical longshore unions of the West Coast split from the ILA in 1937 to form the left-led International Longshore Workers Union (ILWU); 815 was more ideologically like the ILWU, down to the Communist Party influence, but it never broke from the ILA. 815 was also exceptional in being the only local in the Great Lakes region to win a hiring hall of the sort established by the West Coast longshoremen.³³

As a failed case of militant interracial unionism, the case of 815 is striking in that its failure in this regard does not come in the form of a deterioration of race relations, but rather the loss of militancy and broader political commitments. The local was reestablished in 1934 on integrationist principles by which not only the local but the work gangs themselves were mixed groups of native- and foreign-born whites and blacks; this characteristic in fact carried on right through the local's history well past the time period covered here. There was no racist backlash in the form of white workers attempting to monopolize work on the docks, as it often played out dramatically on the East Coast ports.³⁴ White members of the local may well have been taken in by an ideology of "whiteness," but if so, it had no obvious impact on the local's failure as a militant interracial organization. There was no substantial racial split labor market dynamic; work at the port was some of the lowest paid and most dangerous work in the city, and wages and conditions for longshoremen were poor regardless of race.³⁵ Like in many Northern industries, black workers may have mainly entered the waterfront workforce first as strikebreakers (like Polish and Lithuanian migrants before them), most likely in the 1920s; but by the

³³ Eugene Dennis Vrana, "Milwaukee Longshoremen: A Case Study in Conflict and Accommodation, 1850-1975," n.d. Many thanks to Robin Walker, archivist for the ILWU, for sending me this very useful and obscure source.

³⁴ See, e.g., Bruce Nelson, *Divided We Stand: American Workers and the Struggle for Black Equality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

³⁵ The low wages of longshoremen, of course, figure into the explanation of why these workers were disproportionately black. If it had been the case that by the mid-1930s that there was still a split labor market on the waterfront, then it would be much more surprising that the union included rather than excluded them.

time of the local's reconstitution they had been present and accepted on the docks for some time.³⁶

Finally, there is no evidence that employers conspired to split white and black workers as part of a racial divide-and-conquer strategy to undermine class solidarity.

The centrality of these racial dynamics to the development of the American labor movement are well established in the historical literature. Yet none of them are obviously present in the case of the ILA 815's failure to maintain a tradition of militant interracial unionism. It is the absence of these racial dynamics that makes 815 an interesting and exceptional case for investigation.

The ILA 815 thus represents an exceptional case in the historiography of race and the labor movement in the US. To define a case as exceptional is to say that it falls outside of an expected or typical pattern. As such it is sometimes tempting to say that a case is *merely* exceptional, in other words that it is of little interest except as a curiosity, does not produce generalizable claims, and ultimately reveals little about social relations or processes. On the contrary, such cases can have heuristic value in that they reveal or "magnify sets of relations that in less peculiar or extreme instances tend to remain invisible".³⁷ There are three scenarios in which exceptional cases take on this heuristic value: a case as *negation* is one that more or less straightforwardly contradicts some theoretical expectation, and thus allows a better specification of the scope conditions of a theoretical claim; a case as *disruption* is one in which agents can no longer rely on routine scripts and so must make explicit what is normally tacit; and a case as a *prototype* exposes relations that, under more ordinary circumstances, are less conspicuous.³⁸

To be defined as a *negative* case – that is, a case in which the outcome predicted by the theory does not occur – there would need to be more clearly established theories of the dynamic of interracial

³⁶ Vrana, 16-25.

³⁷ Ivan Ermakoff, "Exceptional Cases: Epistemic Contributions and Normative Expectations," *European Journal of Sociology* 55 (2014): 224.

³⁸ Ermakoff, 234-35.

conflict and solidarity in the labor movement than presently exist.³⁹ The three clearest theoretical statements from which predictions might be extrapolated are given by Boswell et al., Gerteis, and Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin. All three talk past one another. Boswell et al., studying unions in coal, steel, and auto, offer the simplest claim: interracial solidarity emerges where split labor market conditions are absent and where unions hire black organizers (i.e., where they adopt the "Miners' Formula," which established a strong interracial union tradition in that industry). Gerteis, on the other hand, studying the Knights of Labor, roots the explanation in the economic and population structures of the city and the organization of independent black community life: where black workers already have some successful independent political and social institutions, solidarity is more likely; and that necessary condition is itself more likely where blacks form critical electoral blocs.⁴⁰ Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin, studying only the CIO unions at the international level, look to organizational factors: interracial solidarity is more likely in international unions characterized by strong formal democracy, the presence of competing organized factions, and Communist Party leadership (or a strong enough Communist Party-led faction that it occasionally won leadership).⁴¹

In a sense, the ILA is a negative case with regard to all three. First, while there were not significant split labor market conditions, a "Miner's Formula" type policy did not emerge as a necessary cause for militant interracialism; the local was reorganized under the initiative of a white organizer from Chicago and apparently no other staff. Second, black Milwaukeeans were, in these years, a small, politically divided population that did not form the majority of any city ward, yet the local emerged in its

³⁹ The methodological benefits of such cases are demonstrated beyond doubt by Rebecca Jean Emigh, "The Power of Negative Thinking: The Use of Negative Case Methodology in the Development of Sociological Theory," *Theory and Society* 26 (1997): 656-58.

⁴⁰ To form such blocs at the city level – *municipal* political opportunity is the crux of the explanation – there needs first to be some considerable degree of residential segregation, and second an electoral system by wards rather than at-large voting.

⁴¹ Boswell et al., 109-54; Gerteis, 76-125; Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin, 212-265.

first several years as a successful militant interracial project.⁴² Third, the ILA was not highly democratic, there was no regular factional competition, and it was certainly not Communist- or left-led, and yet at least one local emerges with these characteristics.

But, in other ways, the case *partially* confirms all of these. Indeed, the absence of a split labor market on the waterfront is one of the basic “enabling factors” for the emergence of solidarity, and the presence of black rank-and-file leadership may stand in for the role accorded to the explicit affirmative action policy called for in Boswell et al. Likewise, while it is true that black residents were nowhere near a majority in the Sixth Ward, the fact of a *concentrated* rather than dispersed pattern of segregation was a precondition for the welter of political organizing taking place among black Milwaukeeans in the Thirties, as it was for Gerteis’ Richmond case. Finally, while the ILA 815 seems to stand out as anomalous vis-à-vis Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin’s organizational theory – a bottom-up, left-led, interracial local within a highly conservative and bureaucratic union – the local converged to the broader ILA pattern within less than a decade after its founding, thanks in part to the nature of the international.

In none of these three explanations is the scope of the argument as broadly set as, say, Emigh’s example of the Marxist theory of the emergence of capitalism. That theory specifies very clear preconditions for a rapid transition to capitalism: efficient agricultural production, well-developed commercial manufacturing, the absence of a strong feudal nobility, a large urban economy. Such clarity allows for an unproblematic selection of Italy as a negative case, in which the necessary preconditions appear to be present, but the rapid transition to capitalism does not occur.⁴³ The three explanations for interracial solidarity do not share the same scope conditions among them; community factors may be

⁴² There were various attempts by black Milwaukeeans to elect a black alder in these years, but black voters and leaders split their support between black candidates and white Socialist candidates (Trotter 1985). The first black person elected to the Milwaukee Common Council was Vel Phillips in 1956.

⁴³ Emigh, 667-70.

much more important in the 19th century urban South and union choices about black representation in personnel much more important in the mining camp and the steel mill town; the effects of Communist Party influence and formal democracy may be important at the international level but of little interest at the local level.

Moreover, each of these three approaches operationalizes the dependent variable in such a way that they may well be looking at distinct phenomena. Boswell et al. look for the formation of integrated rather than segregated or exclusionary locals; Gerteis looks for popular movement narratives that emphasize working-class unity and working-class identity across racial lines, versus those that define "working-class" as white; Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin look for internationals with a formal guarantee of membership equality, at least one black officer or executive board member, and a committee to abolish discrimination. I take still another tack, looking for whether and the extent to which the union organization confers real shopfloor power to black workers and facilitates broader anti-racist political activity. All of these allow for the posing of interesting questions, but do not provide a body of work with a sufficiently specified theoretical claim to identify a proper *negative* case.

To define an exceptional case as a prototype, on the other hand, is not so exacting. A prototype case is one that is of heuristic value because it "has the potential of bringing into relief relational patterns that otherwise lack visibility".⁴⁴ In most studied cases of failed interracial unionism, some specifically *racial* dynamic that is corrosive of class solidarity can be identified – explicit practices of exclusion by union leaderships, rank-and-file opposition to racial equality, or other practices rooted in the racist ideology of whites. It is precisely the ubiquity of such dynamics on the American scene that makes this case stand out, and that otherwise may tend to obscure how mundane capitalist class

⁴⁴ Ermakoff, 235.

dynamics impact and undermine interracial working-class projects. The ILA 815 puts these dynamics as such on full display as an independent determinant of the failure of militant interracial unionism.

5. Sources

The main primary source for this paper is the ILA 815 collection housed by the Wisconsin State Historical Society. This material comprises minutes of the general membership and the executive board; notes on various special meetings, including with employers and political figures; correspondence with other ILA bodies, including other Great Lakes locals, the ILA-Great Lakes District board, and the international leadership; correspondence with other unions and labor bodies, including, notably, locals of the National Maritime Union of the CIO, and the Milwaukee Federated Trades Council. There are 13 archives boxes containing records from 1934 to the 1970s. These have hardly been touched by researchers, with the exceptions of Joe Trotter, who cites some of this material to fill in some minor details in his overall history; Eugene Dennis Vrana, former ILWU historian, used the same collection in an obscure and undated short essay on the history of ILA 815 housed, to my knowledge, only at the ILWU library; and, finally, Robert Chybowski's thesis, while relying mainly on interviews with longtime 815 business agent John Brzek, also cites this record.⁴⁵ To my knowledge these are the only three secondary sources about or making mention of the local, and I have relied heavily upon all of them. Newspaper sources are primarily from the *Milwaukee Journal* and the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, covering various events such as strikes and negotiations by the ILA 815, as well as some of the other activities of leading members. The *Marine Engineering and Shipping Review* provides information about the patterns of trade and the use and development of technology in the industry, from the point of view of capitalists. For descriptive information about the men of the ILA 815 I have consulted available genealogical records through

⁴⁵ Trotter, 163-64; Vrana, 33; Robert Chybowski, "The Leadership of Local 815, International Longshoremen's Association, 1934-1973," MS thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1977), 168-78.

Ancestry.com, which amounts to 519 documents for 193 men. Census records spanning 1900-1940 and draft registration cards from the 1917-18 and 1940-42 comprise 415 of these documents. The remainder are ship manifests, naturalization records, railroad employment cards, and other miscellaneous documents.

Of course, I have consulted a wide array of articles and monographs in order to establish some familiarity with the broad historical sweep of race in the US labor movement, race and labor in the era of the Depression and World War II, longshoremen's unionism in the United States, politics and social movements in Milwaukee, theoretical approaches to class and race and their interconnection, and other related themes. Much of this material was read with a very different version of this project in mind and will not be directly cited but was nevertheless useful in shifting the frame I was using to think through the problem. Here I have in mind especially several memoirs authored by black workers and intellectuals.⁴⁶ Some other works, like Fletcher's Ph.D. dissertation on the Great Lakes package freight carriers and Larrowe's study on labor relations on the Great Lakes provided essential information on the

⁴⁶ I had considered devoting a section or chapter explicitly drawing together black workers' and activists' own observations on the practice of interracial unionism and bringing them to bear on existing theories of the phenomenon; instead, they largely inform the discussion of my motivations above in section 2, in a more inchoate fashion. See, e.g.: James Boggs, "The American Revolution: Pages from a Black Radical's Notebook" in *Pages from a Black Radical's Notebook: A James Boggs Reader*, ed. Stephen M. Ward (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011); Charles Denby, *Indignant Heart: A Black Worker's Journal* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978); Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik: Autobiography of an Afro-American Communist* (Chicago: Liberator Press, 1978); Hudson, *Black Worker in the Deep South*; Nelson Peery, *Black Fire: The Making of an American Revolutionary* (New York: The New Press, 1994); and many others. A brief but deeply intriguing piece by James, while it represents a different sort of case than that presented here, challenges the standard interpretation of the problem of solidarity and conflict in the case of Chicago's Red Summer anti-black pogroms of 1919, for example. See C.L.R. James, "The 1919 Race Riots in Chicago," *Socialist Appeal* 3 (29 August 1939), 3. Reprinted in Scott McLemee, ed., *C.L.R. James on the 'Negro Question'* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996), 111-1; available also on the Marxist Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/james-clr/works/1939/08/chicago-1919.html>.

characteristics of the Great Lakes shipping industry, the employers' associations, and some of the main themes in the history of the labor movement pertinent to this project.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Daniel O. Fletcher, "A Study of Package Freight Carriers on the Great Lakes," (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1960); Charles P. Larrowe, *Maritime Labor Relations on the Great Lakes* (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1959).

Chapter 2: Analytical Framework and Theories of Race-Class Linkages

In this chapter I outline the basic theoretical frameworks I have applied to the case. This is not a new theory of class, race, or their interconnection; and I will not deal here directly with theoretical implications of the case or pose more novel theoretical claims, which is done in the final chapter. Rather, I aim to present the basic lens through which I have approached the source material. It is through these theoretical priors that aspects of the historical context and the source material struck me as relevant for the construction of the causal claim posed in the Introduction and further elaborated in subsequent chapters. That claim, again, is that the case of the ILA 815 is an instance of the militant interracial tradition in the labor movement being undermined not mainly by racial division but by the social relations inherent to capitalist class relations as such; the first section of this chapter is therefore devoted to spelling out this relation at its most general level. The second section elaborates on this framework as it pertains to more meso-level questions of trade union organization. The third section reviews and assesses some of the most influential explanations for interracial conflict and solidarity in the working class from the sociological and historical literature and begin to situate the case of ILA 815 within it. Finally, I conclude with some comments attempting a synthesis in something like the Racial Capitalism (RC) framework.

1. The general model of determination of capitalist class dynamics

The core of the framework adopted here is Erik Olin Wright's general model of class formation and class consciousness, and the summary here tracks very closely to his presentation.⁴⁸ In his framework, Wright suggests a set of micro-level and macro-level interactions. The micro-level model (Figure 1) posits

⁴⁸ Erik Olin Wright, *Class Counts: Comparative Studies in Class Analysis* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), 373-406.

interactions, defined by particular modes of determination, between class location, class consciousness, and class practices; the macro-level model (Figure 2) posits symmetrical interactions between class structure, class formation, and class struggle. The figures are also taken from Wright.

“Class locations” simply refers to the places individuals occupy in the structure of class locations – worker or capitalist, or finer distinctions at more concrete levels of analysis – and class structure to the whole system of class locations and the relations among them. Class consciousness refers individuals’ perceptions of the world, theories about how the world works – crucially, theories about the consequences of actions – and preferences regarding future possibilities have class content and motivate people to act. By “class practices” is meant the intentional activity undertaken by agents in the pursuit of at least some of their class interests, including everyday practices (e.g., selling labor power, learning new skills, disciplining a subordinate, firing employees) or more dramatic ones (e.g., workplace sabotage, joining a strike, intimidating union organizers).

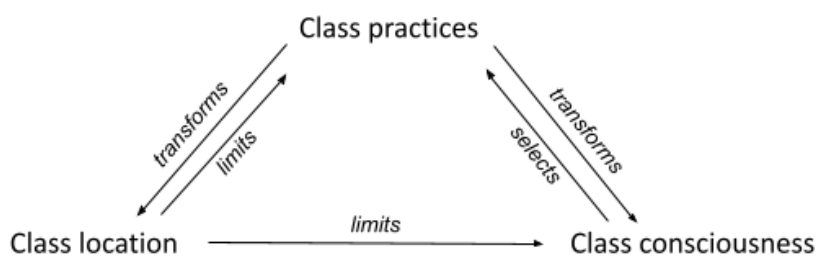


Figure 1. Micro-model of class location, class practices, and class consciousness.

The arrows between each of the three concepts describe the causal relations between them in terms of three distinct modes of determination: limitation, transformation, and selection. The concept of *limitation* describes the effects of structures on the probabilities of all kinds of practices or subjective states occurring. Structures present people with opportunities and obstacles, incentives and disincentives, risks and safeguards; and these differ based on their location in the structure. Structures,

in this way, make people more or less likely to choose this or that course of action, making some kinds of practices more feasible than others, and some essentially impossible. Structures themselves, however, are objects of struggle – people do not simply accept the constraints of structure, but act to change them or to shore them up, depending on how they perceive their interests being met by that structure or not. Practices, then, *transform* structures. The basic notion that structures limit practices while practices, in turn, transform structures, is another way of stating the sociological aphorism that structure and agency reciprocally interact. *Selection*, finally, can be understood as a process of setting “limits within limits” that occurs when two or more structures interact with practices: a primary structure limits practices within some broad realm of plausibility, while a secondary structure selects specific practices or narrower probable sets of practices within those limits.

Thus, the micro-model poses the following broad causal paths. First, class location → *limits* → class consciousness. The class locations in which individuals find themselves impose broad limits on the forms of consciousness they are likely to develop. From the vantage point of a certain class location, certain descriptive accounts of the social world, theories of how society works, and beliefs about what is right and wrong will have more *prima facie* credibility than other accounts, theories, and beliefs. The claim is not that their class locations determine the *entirety* of people’s subjectivity, but that those aspects of a person’s consciousness which have a class character are probabilistically constrained by their location in the class structure. Thus, workers are *on the whole* more likely than capitalists to believe, for example, that unions and social safety nets are desirable, even if one does find some more enlightened individuals within the capitalist class and some laissez-faire ideologists among workers. To reiterate, these limits are very broad and operate on a probabilistic basis; forms of consciousness that seem unlikely by virtue of this relation may emerge and be sustained by other causal processes. In addition, the broad categories “working class” and “capitalists” contain an enormous range of actual

class locations such that the model suggests that we ought to find wide variation in forms of consciousness *within* these groups, but fairly clear differences in the central tendencies *between* them.

Second, class location → *limits* → class practices. Simply put, one's class location determines the access to the resources needed to pursue any course of action and determines what courses of action appear to be feasible paths to the satisfaction of material interests. People in working class locations, as a rule, cannot hope to subsist on financial returns on investment but must find buyers of their labor-power among the owners of capital. They are more likely to seek to raise the price of their labor-power by obtaining training or education than they are to get a loan to start a business (the latter is not impossible, but it is considerably riskier, and so many more workers quite reasonably pursue the former than the latter). Workers may also choose, under certain circumstances, collective practices in pursuit of the satisfaction of interests, such as joining unions or parties.

Third, class consciousness → *selects* → class practices. Class locations establish the broad feasible set of class practices, but people actually choose a course of action within that set based on their perception, theories, and values. For instance, the forms of consciousness of some workers may predispose them toward joining unions more than others, because they have more familiarity with unions and have more compelling reasons to believe they will be effective. Likewise, the forms of consciousness of some capitalists may predispose them toward union-busting more than others.

Fourth, class practices → *transform* → class locations. The concept of class mobility in sociology describes a process whereby individuals, through the courses of action they take in pursuit of their material interests, wind up in some other class location than where they started. But this relation works in various other ways as well. Workers change their class location when they force concessions from their employer for better wages, working conditions, job security, and career ladders; here, the workers are not illustrating "class mobility" in the typical sense, but changing the nature of the class location

itself and its relative position in the class structure. Capitalists' class practices – introducing new technology or monitoring techniques, say – also transforms the nature of the relation between their class location and that of their employees.

Fifth, class practices → *transform* → class consciousness. The perceptions, theories, and values of people are not established once and for all based on where they are in the class structure but shaped by what they do in it. People do not simply face the trade-offs established by their class location, but then must actually make the trade-off, adopting specific strategies in the face of old and new constraints and dilemmas, reflection on past experiences, and acquisition of new information. Workers choose to join unions or stay aloof from them, join or cross picket lines, endure or quit jobs, learn new skills or hone old ones; managers choose to discipline a worker harshly or gently, adopt an easy or hard demeanor, or report or conceal subordinates' infractions from higher-ups. These choices change the consciousness of their agents.

The macro-level model simply reflects an aggregation of micro-level processes, and so the relations in the macro-model are exactly symmetrical to those in the micro-model; what has changed are the three concepts related by the modes of determination.

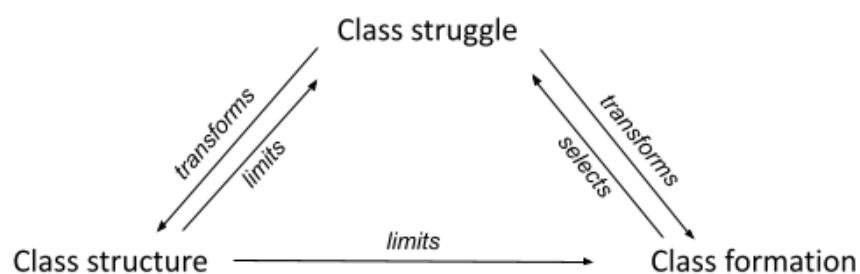


Figure 2. Macro-model of class structure, class struggle, and class formation.

The class structure refers to the aggregation of class locations and the relations between them; class formation to “the formation of collectively organized social forces within class structures in pursuit

of class interests"; and class struggles to antagonistic class practices waged, in general, by opposed class formations.⁴⁹ The basic operation of the modes of determination is the same here as in the micro-model, but for clarity and symmetry I offer brief comments on all five relations.

First, class structure → *limits* → class formation. Three mechanisms are central to the process of limiting class formation: the pattern of material interests generated by class structures, the pattern of identities that emerge from the lived experiences of people based on their placement in some location within those structures; and the distribution of resources in the class structure that affects the strategies and alliances likely or possible to emerge. These correspond, roughly, to Katznelson's four levels of class formation: the level of the structure itself, which broadly establishes patterns of shared and diverging class interests among people placed in the structure; the lived experience of class, in terms of the standards of living and daily interactions borne by people by virtue of their placement in the structure; the level of class identity, in which these experiences cohere into a conscious sense of belonging to the same class among people similarly situated; and the level of class organization, in which people mobilized by that class identity actually form alliances for the pursuit of shared interests.⁵⁰ This is not, it must be reiterated, a claim about an inexorable development in class societies. An enormous array of contingent causal processes intervenes – most obviously other non-class forms of social collectivity as nation, religion, or race – such that shared class interests do not certainly generate shared identities, and shared identities do not guarantee successful organization for collective struggle.

Second, class structure → *limits* → class struggle. Class structures may be characterized by more or less polarization, sharper or duller forms of exploitation, and different degrees of social mobility. A

⁴⁹ Wright, 379.

⁵⁰ Ira Katznelson, "Working-Class Formation: Constructing Cases and Comparisons" in *Working-Class Formation: Nineteenth-Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States*, ed. Ira Katznelson and Aristide Zolberg (Princeton: PUP, 1986), 14-20.

key axis of variation relevant to this study, for instance, is the level of competitiveness among capitalists for profits and among workers for wages, which shape the collective practices of these groups as they pursue antagonistic interests. These variations in the class structure condition the forms of class struggle likely to emerge. One might expect, for example, that explosive class struggles are more likely to emerge in class structures characterized by low levels competition among workers, sharp and miserable forms of exploitation widespread among the working class, and low levels of social mobility. Once again, there are various reasons such struggles may not in fact emerge, even if some set of circumstances makes them more likely, such as the strength of legitimating ideological apparatuses, or low expectations among workers.

Third, class formation → *selects* → class struggle. Class structures, again, set the broad limits on likely forms of struggle, but the actual patterns of organization and political alliances formed among workers and capitalists will select particular forms of struggle within those broad limits. Disorganized capitalists are more easily drawn into signing better contracts for workers, as one and then another employer decides they wish to end the strike at their facility and let it continue at their competitors'; organized capitalists have greater capacity to hold out to defeat a strike. Fragmented workers' organizations may likewise be split off from one another to the benefit of capitalists. Of course, the perennial difficulty of organizing the unemployed has meant a persistent source of division in the working class, even when its employed segment is highly organized.

Fourth, class struggle → *transforms* → class structure. Arguably the central object of class struggle is the class structure. An extreme statement to this effect can be found in the history of the radical United Farm Equipment Workers of America, whose slogan "management has no right to exist" was a frontal attack on the on the class power of employers and a claim that workers' had the responsibility and authority to organize and supervise production. But even more routine struggles over

wages, benefits, and conditions are struggles about the distribution of resources in the class structure, the degree of exploitation workers will endure, and a challenge to owners' claim to an untrammelled right to the profits of the enterprise. Workers' struggles in the 20th century had the impact of transforming aspects of the class structure in a variety of ways: compensation increases improved the class "situation" attached to industrial jobs, making possible a middle-class lifestyle and intergenerational upward mobility more likely for many working-class families; grievance machinery altered the relations of domination between manager and worker, freeing the latter to some extent from the arbitrary whims of the former; Capitalists' imposition of new labor-saving technology, or their movement of facilities to flee organized high-wage workforces,

Finally, class struggle → *transforms* → class formation. Like consciousness, class formation should be understood not only as an outcome but as a process. A powerful union that endures a serious defeat may start to hemorrhage members; an attempt by employers to repress an organizing effort may harden the bonds among workers as soldiers in a war. Where class struggles are routinized and professionalized, unions may persist and expand, but grow feebler in their capacity to mobilize members. The process is perpetual: classes are continuously organized and then scattered, and their members drawn back and forth to collectivities defined in other, non-class terms.⁵¹

The two models are, of course, linked: the macro-level comprises the aggregation of processes at the micro-level; those processes at the micro-level are mediated by relations at the macro-level.

It is useful to reframe elements of the causal narrative posed in the Introduction in terms of the various relations described here. That the concentration of the domestic package freight industry made it more difficult for the ILA to establish stable inter-port cooperation can be interpreted as class

⁵¹ Adam Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy* (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), 71.

structure limiting class formation by the imposition of a barrier – employer monopsony power in the package freight labor market – to district-wide unification. The organizational characteristics of the ILA help to explain the general lack of effort by the union to overcome these barriers interpreted as an instance of class formation selecting a particular form of class struggle, in this case fragmented and decentralized. The capacity of the ILA 815 to establish a hiring hall and extract considerable wage increases is an instance of class struggle transforming class structure. The contrast of Aaron Toliver's radical leadership to John Brzek's conciliatory approach might be seen as an example of class consciousness selecting class practices. Brzek's class practices transformed his class location, as he became the permanent business agent and a full-time paid official of the local rather than a working warehouseman; no doubt those practices also transformed his consciousness, and indeed he became a leader whose public pronouncements and routine activities indicated a "port-consciousness" rather than a class-consciousness. The Great Lakes Transit Company's threat to quit the Port of Milwaukee, on which it followed through, changed both the class relations in the port and the orientation and aims of the union, in an instance of class struggle transforming both the class structure and class formation. The framework here allows the keeping of a mental map of the causal steps in the complex, dynamic process of shifting class relations.

2. Elaboration on class formation

At the heart of this study is the problem of explaining a particular class formation that emerged in the mid-20th century United States which was only one of a variety of possible alternatives. The Thirties saw an explosive blooming of organizational, political, strategic, and tactical experimentation in the labor movement: significant segments of the working class built and experienced democratic cultures in new industrial unions, and exercised collective power at the point of production; they took a foothold in

politics, both by entering the Democratic Party and by launching third party efforts; many came to see broader social relations, not just industrial relations, as their object, and articulated visions of how workers' power ought to transform the world. But by the end of the Forties, it was clear that the movement was reconverging toward an updated "plain-and-simple" unionism: accommodation to capitalists' right to rule, the narrowing of political and social visions, demobilization of rank-and-file members, and routinized negotiation, with the added element of an open partisanship expressed by the alliance with and subordination to the Democratic Party in the political field.

Wright's model does not itself produce any substantive claims about class formation, but rather directs researchers' attention to the complex logic of relations and helps to frame inquiry. Just *how* class structure limits class formation, how class struggle transforms it, and how it affects class struggle is not given by the model but must be answered by historical analysis. This study is an exercise in providing one answer to these question through one empirical case, but it is worth fleshing out some of the more specific theoretical treatments on class formation that have most informed my approach to the historical data.

Figure 3 poses the general model once again, with the determination relations labeled with letters for more convenient identification of causal paths. The micro- and macro-levels here are combined for the sake of brevity only; it should be remembered that the aggregation of micro-level phenomena comprise the macro-level, and the macro-level phenomena mediate the micro-level processes.

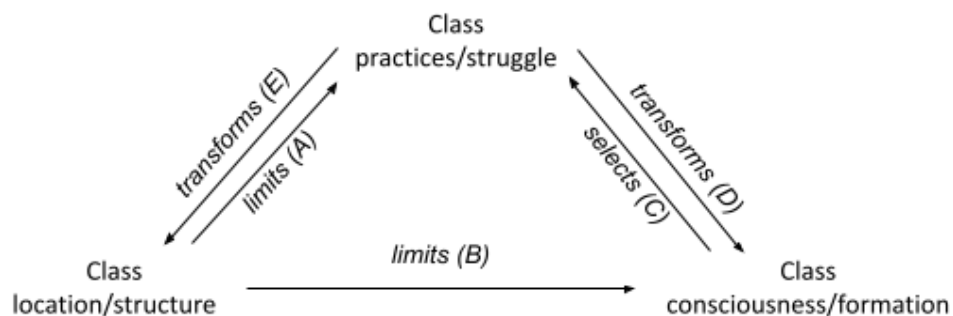


Figure 3. The combined model, with determination relations labeled.

Section 2.1. addresses some of the fundamental structural features of working-class locations that shape the general problem of working-class formation (determination relations A and B), and offers a partial defense for a "structuralist" interpretation of class formation against strictly culturalist accounts while arguing that the importance of cultural factors in class formation follows necessarily from the objective class structure. Section 2.2. outlines a rational choice perspective for thinking through the fundamentals of solidarity and union organization, how solidarity might be conceived of as resting on a strong or weak basis, and how the basic requirements of the reproduction of a labor union introduce dilemmas. Section 2.3. deals with the question of endogenous organizational dynamics tending toward bureaucratization and opportunism in the labor movement (involving relations $D \rightarrow C$, $C \rightarrow E$, $B \rightarrow C$, and A). Section 2.4. addresses the counterweight to these dynamics that emerges in many unions in the form of a militant minority – a group of radical, committed unionists active within the movement (another $D \rightarrow C$ relation, in this case best conceived as an iterated $D \rightarrow C \rightarrow D \rightarrow C \dots$). In section 2.5., I offer summary comments about the bearing of this framework on the case.

2.1. On class location/structure and "limitation"⁵²

In Section 1, it is suggested that an enormous range of possibility are contained within the "limits" imposed by class location/structure, to the extent that it may be difficult to see how, in fact, these concepts help to explain patterns of class consciousness/formation, and class practices/struggle. It is helpful to specify some claims about capitalist class relations to get a clearer idea what exactly is being suggested when we say that the former "limits" the latter; that is, what really is going on "under the hood" with relations (A) and (B) in Figure 3.

⁵² The arguments in this section are based primarily on Claus Offe and Helmut Wiesenthal, "Two Logics of Collective Action," *Political Power and Social Theory* 1 (1980): 67–115.

A workers' place in the class structure is consistent with totally opposite kinds of practices: joining a strike or crossing a picket line, keeping secrets from managers or acting as their informant, hard work or shirking. So, what about class formation or class struggle does class structure help to explain?

Rather than seeing this ambiguity as a problem for the approach, the ambiguity ought to be seen as precisely what is essential about working-class locations and how workers' consciousness is shaped under capitalist class relations, at the most abstract level. The worker's class location is defined by her having to sell her labor-power in order to produce the means of her subsistence in the form of a money wage. In doing so, the worker enters a paradoxical social situation: she surrenders "legal" control over her labor effort for the period of its use by the employer, even while she maintains practical, bodily control over it. The worker is both a partner of the labor contract, and the object bought and sold in the contract – or, at least, she is indivisible from the object bought and sold. The capitalist receives not a finished product of labor, but a human being for a given time period whose labor effort he must extract, often against resistance, by the application of incentives and threats. This social situation is the basis for deep ambiguities – "between individualistic versus collective improvement of one's condition, between economic versus political concepts of one's interest, between the identities as consumer and producer, between the priorities of higher wages versus better working conditions and more secure employment, and between the behavioral alternatives of individual competitiveness and class solidarity" – that confront the worker as she attempts to define her interests.⁵³ Capitalists, unlike workers with their labor-power, are legally and physically separate from their capital.

⁵³ Offe and Weisental, 93.

Workers' unbreakable physical attachment to their labor-power means that they do not have the luxury of compartmentalizing their interests *as a worker* apart from their other interests; they must bring their whole selves along to the job. Virtually all aspects of their personal well-being are drawn into the employment relation, some way or another: present income, future income, the onerousness of the work, the safety conditions of the workplace, the length of the working day, whether there is a pension benefit and its size, the nature of health insurance benefits, the opportunity for time off or flexible scheduling, and all manner of other matters. Differences in workers' age, gender, family status, ability, health status, strength, risk tolerance, time horizons, access to other sources of income, make for widely varying preferences and priorities along these aspects of work with respect to the tradeoffs involved. The "labor" of the capitalist – that is, the "dead" labor under his command that is his capital – can be set to work without his being there, unlike the living labor of the employees. A much larger part of his interests is met outside of the employment relation, and it is easy enough for him within that relation to define his interests *as a capitalist*.

This primary asymmetry in the class position of workers and capitalists necessarily entails different associational practices when these groups form organizations for battle with one another. In most cases, the capitalist hardly needs organization at all; or rather, most of the relevant organizational questions have already been answered by the creation of the firm, and the fact that "dead" labor is organized under his singular command. In a conflict with their labor force, for instance, the leadership of the firm may simply choose to lock the workers out, or credibly threaten to move the facility. For its part, the business *association* to which a capitalist may belong meets relatively few challenges: the organization of the firm handles most of the capitalist's interests, and the state still others, leaving a rather limited range of interests left to be dealt with by the association; these remaining interests are relatively easily identified, and easily pursued by the leadership of the association without need for

much membership input; the incentives of joining the association are clear relative to remaining outside it. These practices – a lockout, relocation, joining an association – may be somewhat costly, but they ultimately rely on capitalists' *willingness to pay*. Of course, no group in capitalist society is better suited to pay.

It is not so for workers. First, as individuals, they have little if any capacity to sanction capitalists. The withdrawal of a single unit or a few units of labor-power is rarely of any consequence for a capitalist. Workers' sanctioning capacity must be created in their association. Second, as suggested above, their organizations have a much more challenging problem of interest aggregation; the diversity of interests and dispositions among workers means that the organization must develop some process for affecting workers' preferences, priorities, and perceptions of their interests. In short, they need some democratic process for establishing courses of action, whereas capitalists' associations can more easily rely on bureaucratic decision-making. Third, they cannot, like capitalists, depend on their willingness to pay, but must rely on their *willingness to act*. The generation of a willingness to act depends first on successful interest aggregation, but also on the creation of a shared collective identity, a sense of mutual obligation among members, and a readiness to endure personal sacrifice for others.

In this light there is an irony in the old Marxist accounts of working-class formation which derive its inevitability straight from the class structure. For capitalists, that account works much better, as the interests of capitalists are much more easily aggregated and pursued monologically. Working-class formation, on the other hand, cries out for the guiding hand of culture. Working-class locations entail highly ambiguous, inconsistent, and contradictory interests that render the intervention of culture, ideology, and politics a foundational necessity for working-class formation. Still, the old Marxists had a point: everywhere in the world where capitalist class relations have emerged, so too have organizations

arisen to define and pursue the collective interests of the working class. It would seem that even the widest variations in the cultural environment are compatible with working-class formation.

How, then, to think about how class structure limits class formation, considering the role of culture? A recent essay by Vivek Chibber lays out the argument for the centrality of the class structure and its relationship to culture: The limits imposed by class structure (and, to reiterate, class location at the micro-level) are quite fundamental, if broad, because that structure defines the basic conditions of the reproduction of lives of the individuals within it.⁵⁴ Moreover, the social rules of the capitalist class structure – those that establish what one must *do* to get what one *gets* – are imposed, *unlike* most other social structures, without the purposeful intervention of individuals or communities, ultimately by the "silent compulsion of economic relations".⁵⁵ In these respects, the class structure may be said to have *precultural* effects. While culture is *indispensable* for class formation and class struggle – solidarities, after all, must be forged to overcome the basic free-rider problems that obtain in any organizational effort, at minimum – class structure cuts culture's work out for it. The specific class structure determines the extent to which workers are vulnerable or insecure, and therefore the extent to which solidaristic strategies represent a risk or sacrifice. It governs the degree to which wage-earners themselves have overlapping or differing objective class interests for the short- to medium-term, and thereby the extent of the difficulty of interest aggregation in working class organizations.⁵⁶ Finally, of course, the extent to

⁵⁴ Vivek Chibber, "Rescuing Class from the Cultural Turn," *Catalyst: A Journal of Theory and Strategy* 1, no. 1 (2017): 27–55, <https://catalyst-journal.com/vol1/no1/cultural-turn-vivek-chibber>.

⁵⁵ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume One* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 899.

⁵⁶ "Objective class interests" is a controversial notion. A culturalist view may hold that a person's interests are just what they believe them to be – there is no set of interests outside of those derived from the agent's own interpretation of the world. I would say that the apprehension and interpretation of interests by agents is certainly a cultural matter, and in this respect belongs to the realm of class formation. But we can derive objective class interests from the social structure, without interrogating agents' meaning orientation. Objective class interests may be defined as the objectives of struggles which *would* occur *if* agents had perfect information about the class structure and their position within it (Wright 1978, 89). In the long term, socialism might be the objective class interest of all workers; but in the short-term, the class structure may be, and often is, such that the collective organization of some set of workers makes some other set of workers worse off. In this case, these workers may not *actually* come into intra-class conflict, because the workers who stand to lose may simply not know that they are at risk due to lack of information, or they may harbor solidaristic values such that they are willing to endure some losses for the sake of the others. But everything else being equal, such a configuration of the *objective* class interests, owing to the nature of the class structure, raises the probability of division or conflict.

which workers are vulnerable or in a state of mutual competition determines the magnitude of the free-rider problem they face in attempting some collective strategy. The class structure, in other words, establishes the parameters of the problems of organization that must be, so to speak, solved by culture.

At the same time, the class structure also lays the basis for new cultures to emerge out of the workplace itself. One of the most significant social changes wrought by the development of capitalism is the destruction of traditional work relations characterized by cooperative labor divided among families and communities, and the rise of new forms of cooperation often stripped bare of these intimate connections. Yet the new organization of production laid a foundation for new relations: large numbers of workers were brought together under the same roof and shared the same relation to their employer. In the process they not only had to cooperate with one another for the completion of work tasks, but also to solve some of the basic problems inherent to their work such as physical hazards and boredom. The nature of cooperative labor in the mining industry, for instance – in which working together also meant to some extent entrusting life and limb to one's coworkers – has been noted as a factor contributing to workers' solidarity across racial lines.⁵⁷ The very same feature of waterfront labor has been cited as a factor contributing to workers' attachment to ethnic and racial distinctions.⁵⁸ Cooperative labor – a concrete necessity in any mode of production – was under capitalism often undertaken among strangers, whose private lives were increasingly divorced from their work lives. In the "separate" sphere of work, any old provincialism had either to bear the weight of exposure to unfamiliar people or else give way to a more cosmopolitan orientation. There is, of course, no *guarantee*

⁵⁷ Letwin; Robert Woodrum, 'Everybody was Black Down There': Race and Industrial Change in the Alabama Coalfields (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007).

⁵⁸ E.g., Nelson, 7.

of the emergence of relations that overcome collective action problems, and construct collective identities; but cooperative labor under capitalism often provides a basis for such relations.

In sum, there is a strong case to be made that capitalist class structures do, in the long run, drive the emergence of *some* kind of working-class formation. But virtually all the interesting politically and strategically relevant variations in the patterns of formation are explained by two other sets of determinants. First, the historically specific, conjunctural features of the class structure at a given time (e.g., the extent of inequality in wages and the distribution of skill assets among workers; the extent of concentration of capital in the various industries; the extent of social mobility and permeability of class boundaries) determine the immediate objective interests of workers and establish the range of alliances and coalitions more or less likely to emerge. Second, given the ambiguity inherent to working-class interests imposed by the nature of the capitalist employment relation, workers may also pursue their interests as individuals, or as members of a collective defined along racial, ethnic, national, religious, or other "non-class" criteria, or along sectoral or occupational lines; the relative strength of workers' attachments to these other collective identities will influence *whether* and *how* they form organizations for the pursuit of class interests.

2.2. Rational actors and group solidarity

Working class people, indeed, often do join and remain in non-class groups and self-identify primarily in non-class terms. The global generality of the fact of working-class organization, apart from the question of the diversity of its particular forms, is consistent with the notion that capitalist class relations produce a more or less predictable set of objective class interests irrespective of national or other cultural variations. But the creation of such interests on its own does not guarantee the formation and coherence of groups committed to their pursuit; but working-class people have interests as individuals

against other individuals, and as members of other kinds of collectives as against other collectives; as much as the global experience of working-class organization indicates a certain set of objective and universal interests attached to working class locations, it also frequently demonstrates the extent to which organization can be fragile, fleeting, or abortive.

Hechter's general theory of group solidarity, based on a rational choice research program, is a useful starting point for clarifying the nature of the problems that any working-class organization must contend with in order to successfully compete for the loyalty of workers against others.⁵⁹ One benefit of the approach is its simplicity: People form groups for the purpose of obtaining some collective good. The coherence of groups is based on two factors: the extent of individuals' dependence on the group for the attainment of that good, and the enforcement capacity of the group – that is, the ability of the group to monitor and sanction members for defection.

The purpose of joining an obligatory group is to acquire *the immanent goods* provided by the group.⁶⁰ Immanent goods are any sort of benefit derived directly from group membership; these include companionship, belonging, a sense of purpose, peace of mind, and reduced financial risk. Labor unions' *raison d'être* is utilitarian: to provide security of employment, improved wages, physical safety at the workplace, protection from arbitrary discipline, and the like. As with all obligatory groups, workers' dependence on their union for access to these immanent goods is a function of the organizational ecosystem that characterizes their social environment: the presence of alternative sources of the

⁵⁹ Michael Hechter, *Principles of Group Solidarity* (Berkeley: UCP, 1987).

⁶⁰ As opposed to a compensatory group. An obligatory group exists to provide members with immanent goods – which by their nature are non-fungible – in exchange for their acceptance of obligations (hence “obligatory”) toward the group; compensatory groups provide payment from the production of some commodity good, the production of which doesn't immediately benefit the producers.

desired immanent goods; access to information about these substitutes; the costs of exiting the group; and the strength of their social ties within the group.⁶¹

Unlike many other kinds of obligatory groups, however, unions must not only deal with the internal problem of free riders, but with the external problem of antagonism and repression. A mutual aid association may fail in achieving coherence and robustness, but it is unlikely to fail on account of having made enemies who attempt to *impose* free-rider problems on the group. Moreover, unions must not only succeed in disciplining members to submit a portion of their own wages to a collective pool and contribute time to the group; they must also present the employer with a credible threat of imposing greater costs than those represented by their demands for increased compensation. In other words, unions' capacity to provide their members with the desired benefits rests on their achievement of power. If the union is powerless to extract concessions from the employer, it hardly matters if members have no other alternative group to join – they will be less apt to obey or enforce the norm of union membership or on-the-job solidarity more broadly.⁶² In such a situation, they simply cannot obtain the desired goods – better wages, job security, better conditions – on the job, and it is better not to pay dues, and avoid termination and the blacklist. In short, members' commitment to the union hinges on the union's capacity to deliver. In Hechter's terms, if the union cannot deliver in the first place, then no member is dependent upon it, and the group cannot cohere.

The union's capacity to deliver depends on the strength of members' commitment to the organization – the depth of their collective identification with the union and their willingness to pay

⁶¹ Hechter, 40-49.

⁶² This idea is in line with the findings of Ahlquist and Levi (2013), who show that the basis for some unions' expansive sense of solidarity — not only with other members, but with workers and oppressed people throughout the world — was the capacity of the union to keep delivering victories at the workplace to the membership. Without this, the widening of the "community of fate" to include distant people with distant problems was simply a non-starter.

dues and act on its behalf. For this reason, unions “are forced to rely on nonutilitarian forms of collective action, which are based on the redefinition of collective identities”.⁶³ Even where unions strictly seek “bread-and-butter” victories, their reliance on members’ commitment necessitates the production of other immanent goods – pride, dignity, belonging, identity.

The experience of being locked in a pitched battle with an employer over some issue can bring about a sense of unity.⁶⁴ Yet the imperative to stably maintain power, once a union is established and becomes a more or less routine player in industrial conflict, cannot leave everything up to members’ collective identities. There is not always an inspiring life-or-death struggle that will unite the workers into a phalanx, and more ordinary times still demand the regular payment of dues. The union cannot rely solely on the enthusiasm of the membership, and requires mechanisms for monitoring and sanctioning free riders.

In general, the development of sanctioning capacity and the transition to life as a permanent organization impose certain tensions and dilemmas that are elaborated in 2.3. below that ultimately threaten the stability of unions in the long run. Here, the point is that unions can hope to survive only by, first, ensuring that workers get something they need out of membership in the union that they cannot reasonably obtain elsewhere, and second, by the establishment of mechanisms for the prevention of free riding. What is offered may vary widely, but some minimal material benefits must be forthcoming, and to the extent formal machinery – such as the union shop or the hiring hall – is set up to ensure the prevention of free riding, the union is not as reliant upon creating a sense of camaraderie or

⁶³ Offe and Weisenthal, 78-79.

⁶⁴ Hence the old labor movement idiom: “The boss is the best organizer.” Especially sharp conflicts can create deep, long-lasting collective identities within unions. Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin demonstrate the importance of prior struggles as a determinant in the maintenance of vital and democratic union organizations (24-53). Kimeldorf emphasizes the importance of the Big Strike generation of workers on the West Coast in explaining the different form waterfront unionism took there compared to the East (*Reds or Rackets*, 99-110; 120-25).

shared identity in the immediate term. Thus, based on the two core elements of members' dependency and the organization's sanctioning capacity, it is possible to see how group solidarity may be established on a robust basis of shared identity and structures of meaning, or on a thinner basis of simple cost-benefit calculations and the absence of other options.

2.3. A sociological theory of union opportunism and a class analysis of labor officialdom

The antinomies at the heart of the working-class locations thus impose certain general tendencies on working-class formation while leaving open a wide range of specific outcomes. The tendency for workers' unions and parties to lose their energetic and participatory character, become disconnected from the needs and attention of their constituencies, and develop in a bureaucratic direction is a dilemma that socialists and social scientists have long sought to explain. Rather than seeing this as simply an inexorable "iron law of oligarchy," an explanation for this tendency of working-class organizations should be rooted in the dynamic of capitalist class relations.

The best treatment of the dynamic at work comes, again, from Offe and Weisenthal in what they call a sociological theory of opportunism.⁶⁵ They describe the emergence of opportunism in workers' organizations as a result of a series of dilemmas arising from their *success*. Above, I described their argument that capitalists' class capacity relies on their willingness to pay, and their associations can be easily run in a top-down manner, while workers' class capacity relies on their ability to act, and their associations must entail some democratic process for interest aggregation. In fact, it is more complicated: workers' organizations must rely on *both* associational modes. In the event of a strike, for instance, they must both win the participation of members, and also have sufficient strike funds to

⁶⁵ Offe and Weisenthal, 103.

offset workers' lost wages. But there are contradictions between the two, and the labor officialdom has powerful incentives to resolve dilemmas in favor of the bureaucratic (top-down, monologic) rather than democratic (bottom-up, dialogic) mode of collective action. This is not a reflection of the moral corruption of labor officials, but of their rationality.

The argument goes like this. In the first phase, the organization is characterized by its strong dialogic character: democratic practices identify and articulate the collective interests of workers, the organization devotes itself to the establishment of a collective identity and the cultivation of a 'willingness to act' among its members, and this phase is often associated with highly militant struggles. In the second phase, a dilemma emerges as a result of the organization's initial success: deriving power not just from the actual mobilization of members but from the union's opponents' *recognition of their potential* capacity to mobilize, the union both needs to maintain that capacity while making sure that members do not *actually* mobilize prematurely – because that would reduce the incentive for employers to offer concessions in order to avoid strikes. If the organization fails to maintain *potential* mobilizing capacity, its chances for survival are reduced; it fails to hold back *actual* (premature) mobilization, its chances for success are reduced.

In principle there are two possible transformations of the organization that solve the dilemma. The first is a reversion to the first phase – a highly participatory, democratic, and militant organization that maintains a high willingness to act among its members. This solution, however, is only likely in the context of a highly politicized class struggle which would provide a viable alternative strategy for winning greater concessions than more ordinary bargaining procedures. Absent that context – that is to say, under normal circumstances – the only transformation of the organization that neither threatens the survival of the organization nor seriously interferes with its chances for success is the opportunist resolution. This is the third phase.

In the third phase, rather than devoting itself to the permanent maintenance of mobilizing capacity, the organization attempts to make its survival *independent of* members' willingness to act. Crucial to this transformation is the search for *external* guarantees of survival. These guarantees may be provided by the state by way of favorable labor legislation, as well as by employers signing voluntary recognition agreements. The support from employers and the state will generally be forthcoming only if the organization signals to them that it will not threaten the basic political-economic arrangements already in place; therefore, the long-term goals of social transformation that might have been present at the first phase of the life of the organization are likely to be rendered symbolic or dropped altogether. Internally, the process of making survival independent of the activity of members entails bureaucratization – the concentration of decision-making into a more centralized and professionalized leadership, and an emphasis on individual incentives and sanctions (rather than collective identities and solidarities) as motivation for members to join the organization.

Opportunism, then, rather than simply a moral failing on the part of union leaderships or a mere expression of their narrow material interests, is a rational way of solving the problem of ensuring the survival and success of the organization past the extraordinary moments of collective action that typically characterize their initial formation. This solution itself contains a dilemma, however – once the organization has ensured that its survival is independent from its member mobilization capacity, it tends to let that capacity erode, or positively seeks to reduce it when it seems threatening to the stability of the existing arrangements. At this point, union officials had better hope that the hard-won external guarantees are not somehow revoked, because they cannot easily generate members' willingness to act. The opportunist solution was rational, but unstable: having forfeited the mobilizing capacity, the strong sense of collective identity among members, and the solidarity that comes with it, the organization is

highly vulnerable to serious threats. It can no longer "guarantee the external guarantees." This is the fourth phase.

This tendency is explicable in terms of what is rational from the perspective of the survival of the union organization as a whole – an outcome which is in the interests of all the members of the organization irrespective of their position within it. Offe and Wiesenthal thus do not elaborate much on the changes wrought by new organization on the class location of some workers, turning them into permanent, full-time labor officials. This is mentioned as an element of third phase of the process necessary to decouple the union's existence from its members' willingness to act, but little more is said about the internal dynamic that results from the change. But this is an essential dynamic: it is the rise of this group and the power endowed by their administrative position in the organization that makes the opportunist solution almost certain to be chosen.

The class analysis of the labor officialdom has been one of the central defining intellectual projects of the left wing of the labor movement from the late 19th century, when the labor bureaucracy itself was still inchoate and immature. Perhaps the most systematic early treatment of the question from the left is famed Communist labor leader William Z. Foster's *Misleaders of Labor*, produced for the Trade Union Educational League, an inter-union formation which sought to unite and extend the influence of radicals within the AFL. While the text certainly has its share of strident invective, it also clearly articulates the material basis of labor leaders' conservatism: "[The dominant trade union leaders] look upon the labor movement not as a weapon for the liberation of the working class, but primarily *as a means for themselves*, personally, to gain an easy living. They are ignorant, corrupt, and narrowly materialistic. They are saturated with petty bourgeois conceptions. They have reduced to a science the

selling out of the workers. *They have bid a permanent good-bye to the work bench.* Their plan is to get rich quick while the opportunity presents itself. They are all too often successful..."⁶⁶

The basic argument goes like this: As unions consolidate their position as a permanent force in the workplace that outlasts the extraordinary mobilizations necessary to form the organization, there tends to develop a layer of labor leaders who become full-time paid administrators of the organization, along with a supporting staff – none of whom share the members' "work bench." These full-time union leaders act as negotiators and mediators between the union's members – the workers – and the representatives of the employing capital. They are not formally "neutral" mediators, in the sense an arbitrator would be – their job, of course, is to represent the interests of the membership, and the membership can, at least in principle, "fire" the labor leaders if they are insufficiently sensitive to the interests of members or incompetent in their pursuit. But they are themselves "pulled" away from the interests of the membership by virtue of their new class location as a labor official and tend to adopt an opportunist orientation.

Many labor leaders conduct themselves honestly and ably, but the features of their class position can, under some circumstances, put their interests at odds with those of the memberships they ostensibly represent. Rather than relying on wages paid out of the employers' capital for their individual reproduction, like the members they represent, they are paid out of the revenues raised from the membership. Their power and influence derive from their office, rather than their capacity for shopfloor leadership. The maintenance of the organization *as such* may thus tend to take priority over struggles to improve members' conditions. The labor leader's interest in this regard gives employers a useful strategic tool: rather than engage in simple, crude repression, which often backfires anyway, employers

⁶⁶ William Z. Foster, *Misleaders of Labor* (Chicago: Trade Union Educational League, 1927), 23. Emphasis mine.

can offer tolerance of the organization, or even facilitate its growth, in exchange for more collaborative attitudes from the leadership.⁶⁷ In times of growth especially, there is a strong incentive for labor officials to stabilize bargaining relationships – which often means lowering workers' expectations about how much they stand to benefit from growth.⁶⁸

In terms of the model, the processes at work here are represented by the causal paths (D→C), the collective struggle among workers affecting a transformation of class formation in the form of the establishment of a new organization, followed by their attempts to shore up and consolidate their gains; (C→E), the new organizations adopting practices geared toward making them permanent, including the election of full-time salaried leadership and their empowerment in the hiring of staff and appointment of officers, creating new class locations in the form of labor officialdom; (A), the class location of union officials comes with a different broad feasible set of strategies for self-reproduction than that of union members, in terms of what they have to do to keep their position, secure an income, or advance careers; (B→C), the class location of union officials can affect their attitudes about what demands are feasible or appropriate – that is, their consciousness – which in turn affects their strategic choices, in particular adjusting their preferences sharply toward opportunist strategies; (D), employer strategies in the class struggle shape the processes whereby leadership personnel and policies in workers' organizations are determined.

It should again be borne in mind that the mode of determination at work in (A) and (B) is *limitation*, not selection, so it cannot be assumed that the practices or consciousness of labor leaders

⁶⁷ It is not unusual for employer tactics here to involve outright bribes to labor leaders to call off a strike or other such crude maneuvers, especially in an era when patronage, bossism, and cronyism were perfectly typical elements of governance. Foster (*ibid.*, 23) emphasizes these vulgar forms of betrayal for propagandistic purposes, but the essential structural forces operate on honest leaders just the same.

⁶⁸ Kim Moody, “The Rank and File Strategy: Building a Socialist Movement in the US” (Detroit: Solidarity, 2000), 10. Available at <https://solidarity-us.org/pdfs/RFS.pdf>.

are straightforwardly derived from their new class location in every case. In particular, formative experiences they had as rank-and-file union members may have taught them that militancy delivers victory, or defeat, which led to their adopting new practices, which led to new lessons that reinforced or undermined old ones – in other words, they bring with them a consciousness already transformed by previous class practices. Under certain circumstances, explored in the following section, union leaderships can emerge that are more highly resistant to opportunist methods.

2.4. The role of the militant minority

Offe and Wiesenthal describe a growing contradiction between monologic and dialogic modes of collective action in unions that tends to be resolved by a slide toward the former. Yet this is posed as a tendency rather than an "iron law." The tension between monologic and dialogic modes of collective action, itself partially rooted in the ambiguity of interests attached to working-class locations, becomes one important basis for *internal* struggles over competing visions of unionism. Elements within the unions may seek to resolve the contradiction not by the opportunist solution, by staying as near to the "first phase" as possible – that is, by sustaining a highly activated rank-and-file, a democratic and participatory culture, and a strong collective identity. Activists and scholars have named such elements the *militant minority*: committed, active trade unionists who "endeavored to weld their workmates and neighbors into a self-aware and purposeful working class", who in other words sought to encourage among their peers a working-class identity, a sense of commitment to their whole class, and a transformative, expansive vision of unionism.⁶⁹ The militant minority, then, wages an ideological

⁶⁹ David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987), 2.

struggle among their coworkers, often against their official leaders, and sometimes against competing ideological factions in the rank-and-file.

Kim Scipes's comparative study of two CIO unions, the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC, chartered as the United Steel Workers of America [USWA] in 1942) and the Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee (PWOC, United Packinghouse Workers of America [UPWA] in 1943), emphasizes the importance of this aspect. SWOC and PWOC were started by the CIO leadership to organize these respective industries on an industrial basis. They were completely top-down initiatives, and operated in a centralized, essentially authoritarian manner: SWOC was established by United Mine Workers (UMWA) president John Lewis, who appointed its leadership and installed his vice president Philip Murray as director; when the organization began to recruit packinghouse workers in significant numbers, Murray appointed UMWA stalwart and SWOC Midwest director Van Bittner to direct PWOC, cast in the SWOC model. This beginning differentiated these unions from those that founded the CIO, who brought with them their internal representational structures intact, and especially those that joined the CIO as the result of a bottom-up anti-AFL insurgency. Despite similar beginnings of the two organizations, and the comparable industrial conditions facing steelworkers and packinghouse workers, the two organizations diverged in their development: SWOC/USWA remained a highly top-down, bureaucratic organization with a narrowly conceived vision of trade unionism that places it firmly in the tradition of conservative "business" unionism; PWOC/UPWA instead developed into a much more democratic organization that became one of the truly exemplary "social justice" unions in American labor history.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Scipes, 49-52.

Both business unionism and social justice unionism are largely concerned with "bread-and-butter" issues, of course, but the tactics, strategies, and animating philosophies of the two forms drive very different patterns of class formation. Ideologically, business unionism – sometimes known as "trade unionism, pure and simple" – rests on a basic acceptance of the employers' right to manage production, is concerned with the promotion of peaceful and class-collaborative industrial relations, and tends toward aloofness (at best) toward broader social concerns – even those that may deeply impact the lives of union members – seeing these as outside the union's purview and potentially disruptive to its narrow workplace aims. The emphasis on orderliness and cooperation means that, under some circumstances, union officials must aggressively manage rank-and-file discontent and discipline restive members. Social justice unionism, on the other hand, tends to insist on workers' power at the point of production to affect workplace conditions, take a more assertive and adversarial posture toward management, and encourage broader social movement activity and coalition-building to address workers' concerns or interests in the context of their communities. Social justice unions tend to promote a wider class consciousness among their members and workers' involvement in various social reform projects. Simply put, these two forms of unionism represent two visions for what kinds of struggles workers ought to wage, and how they ought to transform the class structure: business unions acquiesce to the basic organization of the capitalist class structure, seeking only to improve or maintain the conditions of the specific class locations occupied by their members; social justice unions are not necessarily anti-capitalist, but they engage in struggles with the aim of benefiting the working class as a whole and adopt practices that challenge management prerogatives.⁷¹

⁷¹ I've adopted the term "social justice unionism" in this section, following Scipes' usage. It must be pointed out that term as he defines it does not really correspond to its present popular use in union circles, which tends to be something more like what Scipes calls "social movement unionism": that is, taking on extra-bargaining unit political projects, or crafting and framing union demands in terms of the benefits for nonmember constituencies. This latter meaning is frequently implied where a teachers' union, for instance, adopts bargaining planks specifically to the

In terms of the model, Scipes's cases present a puzzle: despite similar class-structural conditions (limitation) and similar original class-formational conditions (selection), the USWA and the UPWA sharply diverge in their trajectories of development. Thus, he argues that whether a union develops into a business union or a social justice union must depend on a dynamic *internal* to the organization – the 3-way interaction between union leaders, the rank-and-file, and the activist layer. His explanation comes down to the matter of whether there is a sustained militant minority within the union.⁷² In PWOC/UPWA, the presence of a critical mass of radical activists kept the rank-and-file relatively activated and mobilized, and better positioned to apply pressure on the leadership. By 1939, Bittner lost legitimacy with PWOC membership for negotiating with Armour on a plant-by-plant basis rather than calling a strike to force a nationwide agreement; he was reassigned by the CIO out of the industry by 1941. His next two replacements were quickly pushed out by the activist membership until finally the highly respected Ralph Helstein took leadership in 1946 and served as president of a democratic union for the next 22 years. This situation was different in SWOC/USWA, which, lacking a significant militant minority of the sort that existed in the packinghouses, quickly developed into a highly top-down union. Leadership succession in SWOC/USWA proceeded in an orderly fashion without the significant intervention of the membership, with Murray keeping the helm until 1952, before turning it over to David McDonald, who had been second-in-command. In fact, left-wing working-class militants, especially members and sympathizers of the Communist Party in this case, were present in both organizations, but they were situated very differently: in PWOC they were shopfloor leaders and

benefit of students or parents. Elsewhere I adopt terminology such as “militant”, “rank-and-file”, or “class struggle” unionism to capture what Scipes’ means when he says social justice unionism.

⁷² Scipes, 350.

activists, that is, the "militant minority" properly conceived; in SWOC they were employed staff organizers of the union.⁷³

The next chapter will give a more in-depth review of longshore unionism, but it is worth mentioning here for the sake of an additional example. Given the personal and political differences between Joseph Ryan, president of the ILA, and Harry Bridges, president of the ILA Pacific Coast District and then of the ILWU, it may be tempting to explain the dramatic split of the ILA and the divergent development of the ILA and ILWU as mainly a result of those individual differences, and there is no doubt that they mattered. The differences in the structure of class relations on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts also figure into the explanation, where capital was fragmented and dispersed in the former case and highly centralized in the latter. But here, as well, the presence and actions of activists is key to understanding why the ILA would remain one of the most conservative labor unions while the ILWU became one of the most left-wing. One important difference was the orientation of Communist Party activists within the longshore workforce on the two coasts. In San Francisco, CP members had chosen to ignore the Comintern's "Third Period" policy to organize independent unions outside of the AFL, and so positioned themselves to take advantage of a huge opportunity to recruit and expand their influence within the ILA when the massive waterfront strike came that year. In New York, on the other hand, CP activists hewed to the party line, attempting to recruit workers *away* from the ILA into the CP-initiated Marine Workers Industrial Union; this left them isolated and ineffectual.⁷⁴

⁷³ See also: Micah Uetrict and Barry Eidlin, "U.S. Union Revitalization and the Missing 'Militant Minority'," *Labor Studies Journal* 44, no. 1 (2019): 39. The crucial difference between the presence of left-wing staffers and a militant minority formation as such is, of course, the matter of staffers' serving as employees of the union itself. John Lewis's quip that he gave in response to questioning about keeping Communists on his payroll – "Who gets the bird: the hunter or the dog?" – makes sense because the left-wingers worked for him. The militant minority is another hunter after the same bird, so to speak.

⁷⁴ Kimeldorf, *Reds or Rackets*, 97-98.

It should be emphasized that the size, spread, and influence of the militant minority, while naturally tied up with fate of the Left, is not coterminous with Communists in particular, or with members of left-wing third parties in general. In the case of the ILWU, the left-syndicalist tradition of the IWW was also a crucial factor. In some cases, Communist Party members pitted themselves *against* the militant minority, as when they became enthusiastic enforcers of the no-strike pledge during World War II or integrated into the trade union bureaucracies. The militant minority included (C/c)ommunists, (S/s)ocialists, Trotskyists, anarchists, Musteites, and no doubt other more obscure grouplets; but perhaps most of them have been workers whose ideological stances are not so easily categorizable, who never had "membership" in a formal left-wing political tendency, but who had strong, explicit commitments to class struggle. Their specific ideological orientation was less important than their activity. They were often among the most committed and capable organizers, not only drawing more members into the union but turning out members to union meetings and events; they helped to keep broader layers of the rank-and-file informed of the union's policies, debates, and stances; they linked workplace struggles with struggles in the broader community of which their coworkers were a part; and they took public stances in favor of more radical courses of action, raised members' expectations about what was possible.⁷⁵ Where militant minorities were sufficiently large and active, their effect was to restrain the opportunistic tendencies inherent to the class location of labor officialdom – either by forcing officials to be more accountable and representative, or by themselves becoming labor officials with organic links to an activated rank-and-file.

It is in this sense that class formation is "a struggle *about* class before it is a struggle *among* classes",⁷⁶ and represents an "intra-class struggle within the class struggle".⁷⁷ In terms of the model,

⁷⁵ Uetrict and Eidlin, 40-51.

⁷⁶ Przeworski, 70.

what is at work here is the iterative interaction (C→D→C→D...): a given formation imposes some structural constraints on agents (C) within which various tendencies compete for influence and leadership, transforming the formation in the process (D), whose transformation changes the structural conditions within which agents operate (C). The presence or absence of an active militant minority can spell the difference between development toward a radical, class-conscious organization that seeks fundamental transformations in class relations, or toward a moderate, strictly "job-conscious" organization that seeks peaceful assimilation into existing class relations.⁷⁸

2.5. The framework and ILA 815

Chapter 3 will offer more elaborate comments on longshoremen's unionism and the ILA, but it is necessary here to say something about how this framework helps to make sense of the case. Sections 2.1. and 2.2. lay down quite general and abstract principles about the nature of working-class locations and the determinants of group solidarity that point to a few important observations. First, capitalist class relations at once create some alignment of interests among workers by virtue of their homologous locations in the system of relations; while the private, atomized character of the employment relation and the indivisibility of labor-power from the person of the worker pull in the other direction, making such alignment difficult by the inherent diversity of the people in these locations. Class solidarity is thus

⁷⁷ Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin, 20.

⁷⁸ The "job-consciousness" concept is associated mainly with Selig Perlman (1928). Notwithstanding excellent critiques (e.g., Kimeldorf 1991) of the essentialism often inherent in the use of such concepts, including its counterpart class-consciousness, they are descriptively apt "ideal types," represent two possible forms of consciousness among many, and can be conceived as operating at different degrees or intensities. That is, stripped of the essentialist assumptions that commonly accompany them – whereby Marxists assume any act of resistance, no matter how small, indicates the socialist "instincts" of the working class, or whereby Wisconsin School historians assume any act of resistance, no matter how large, can only ultimately indicate workers' defensive posture – the terms "job-consciousness" and "class-consciousness" usefully differentiate two observable tendencies in the ideologies and practices of labor movements.

made possible, but difficult. Second, the capitalist disarticulation of the work from its traditional communitarian contexts draws strangers together whose encounters may be characterized by competition and conflict; meanwhile, the separate and delimited nature of the workplace can make narrowly workplace-based modes of solidarity seem realistic and non-threatening to a traditional worldview (e.g., the distinction between "industrial" and "social" equality). Third, solidarity may be based as much on enthusiastic collective feeling as on dependency and enforcement; once constituted, an organization may be positioned to simply threaten expulsion of those who would stir up internal factionalism, and the latter may calculate that it is better to put their objections aside.

Together, these observations suggest that it should not be so surprising to see forms of interracial solidarity emerge, at least on a narrow or provisional basis, in times where forces tending toward outright racial *conflicts* among workers are weak, as was mostly the case in Milwaukee in the Thirties, and especially on the waterfront. If the group threat hypothesis – roughly, that anti-outgroup sentiment increases in proportion to the size of the outgroup – is correct, then a small and very slow-growth black community in the city in those years would suggest better conditions for interracial coalitions to form.⁷⁹ The absence of a racially split labor market dynamic on the Milwaukee waterfront also removes another common cause of interracial conflict (the concept of the split labor market is discussed below in section 3; racial patterns in wages among Milwaukee longshoremen are discussed in chapter 4).

The conditions described in section 2.3. tending toward the formation of bureaucratic structure and method in unions are central to understanding the union's conflict and transformation in 1942, part of which included reforms designed to distribute power away from the working stewards and centralize

⁷⁹ Blalock.

it further in the business agent. Organizationally, the willingness and capacity of ILA 815 to engage in unauthorized strikes was rooted in the power of stewards on the job and was the main reason employers threatened to stop calling at the port of Milwaukee; this threat was the central motivation for the centralizing reforms. But some authoritarian tendencies had already arisen within the union in leaders' efforts keep revenue flowing into the usually stretched coffers. It is likely that the emergence of these tendencies had soon started to erode the participatory exuberance of the local's early days when it was founded in the wave of industrial solidarity in 1934.

The presence of something like a militant minority, the role of which is described in section 2.4., is clearly discernable on the Milwaukee waterfront, in the form of the men expelled in 1942. But they depart from the ideal militant minority formation in some ways. Two of the men had been officeholders, including Aaron Toliver who held some or another official leadership position from the earliest records of the local until his expulsion, but none of the others did. In this way they did not quite represent a leadership clique, as their opponent Brzek was wont to describe them, but theirs was the leading tendency.⁸⁰ It is less clear exactly what influence they exercised among the rank-and-file, where the role of the militant minority really counts. They were obviously not influential enough to prevent their own expulsions, which a large majority of the membership ratified. After that point, either fellow militants saw the fate of their comrades and the writing on the wall, and kept their head down knowing that the battle was lost; or there simply were not many fellow militants. For older men on the docks who had lived through the Twenties – when the union had been driven out by hostile employers the last time – there may have been a strong inclination to play it safe rather than risk losing their organization again.

⁸⁰ Chybowski, 13-16.

3. Race and class in theory

It remains to add race and racism to this theoretical picture. A great deal has been written to date about the character of the relationship between race and class in the United States. In the following section, I summarize and briefly assess the predominant approaches to one key element of the race-class interconnection: the relationship of racial division to class formation. The questions are these: Why is interracial working-class solidarity so rare, and intra-class racial division so durable? Under what social conditions is interracial working-class organization likely to form and persist? Under what conditions will it tend to falter? What practices and strategies do people adopt which tend to undermine or support such efforts? Do white workers have a stake in the preservation of racism?

Explanations of the difficulty of interracial working-class solidarity typically focus on the problem of how race affects class – in particular, how racism undermines interracial unity by some or another mechanism. In this section I want to emphasize two points: first, the reciprocal causality of class and race, or how failures of interracial projects can be explained not only by dynamics rooted in race but also class. Second, while the *success* of interracial project is typically explained by reference to class dynamics – especially the homogeneity of economic interests and experiences imposed by capital on workers – I want to emphasize how racial dynamics can increase the likelihood of interracial solidarity. This is important for the case, where *both* the success and subsequent failure of militant interracial solidarity must be explained.

This configuration of two sets of causal paths (race affects class; class affects race) and two opposing outcomes (solidarity undermined; solidarity enhanced) conveniently allows for an organization of the various arguments in a 2x2 table, shown in Figure 4. In quadrant A are some of the best-known approaches to the question of how racial dynamics tend to undermine class formation – arguably the central problem of the American labor movement. These are the divide-and-conquer strategies of

employers;⁸¹ the effect of racially split labor markets in creating conflict rooted in wage competition among workers;⁸² the hold of white supremacist ideology on the leadership and rank-and-file of labor organizations;⁸³ and, somewhat different, the attachment to the identity of whiteness among workers of European descent.⁸⁴

	Undermines solidarity	Enhances solidarity
Race affects class	A <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divide-and-conquer (Reich; Baron) • Split labor markets (Bonacich) • White supremacist ideology (Goldfield) • Whiteness (Roediger) 	C <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demographic features (Jones) • Segregated power bloc (Gerteis) • Racialized outsiders (Virdee)
Class affects race	B <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General competition among workers 	D <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic homogenization (Reich, Gordon, Edwards) • Political-institutional homogenization (Goldberg, Jones)

Figure 4. Classification of published literature by causal path and outcome.

I argue that none of these approaches to explaining the failure of interracial solidarity can describe the decline of militancy in ILA 815. Most of this dissertation is devoted to elaborating the argument that class dynamics, in particular forces intensifying generalized labor market competition among workers, rather than racial dynamics, are really central to explaining the decline – this would place my basic argument in quadrant B. I assume that this argument receives sufficient elaboration throughout the rest of the work, and section 2 above contains some discussion of the basic competitive and class-fragmenting processes at work, so I will not belabor it in this section.

⁸¹ Gordon, et al., *Segmented Work*; Reich, et al., “Dual Labor Markets”.

⁸² Bonacich, “A Theory of Ethnic Antagonism”. Also Edna Bonacich, “Advanced Capitalism and Black/White Race Relations in the United States: A Split Labor Market Interpretation,” *American Sociological Review* 41, no. 1 (1976): 34–51.

⁸³ Goldfield, “Class, Race, and Politics”.

⁸⁴ Roediger, *Wages*.

Two of the three approaches listed in the quadrant C – racial dynamics tending to enhance the prospects of interracial solidarity – may be applicable to the case of ILA 815. These are, first, the formation of black power blocs rooted in patterns of segregation,⁸⁵ and second, the tendency for what Virdee calls 'racialized outsiders', or groups whose subjugation and symbolic exclusion from national projects tends to nurture an oppositional consciousness, to act as carriers within the working class of anti-racist and internationalist political traditions and impulses.⁸⁶ Will Jones's history of lumber workers points to the racial demographics of the workforce at the time of unionization as a key determinant; this explanation seems to work somewhat less well for the case here.⁸⁷

Quadrant D lists arguments that pose class dynamics as causes of interracial solidarity. Again, like with quadrant B, some of the fundamental processes at work are already named in Section 2 above, but two arguments from the literature are especially relevant. The first is the homogenization of labor, referring to patterns of capitalist development that tend to create broadly similar experiences of work and living standards for large masses of workers, "ironing out" many of the hierarchical distinctions among them in terms of compensation, ownership of skill assets, or workplace authority.⁸⁸ The homogenization of labor is not best understood as a general secular tendency of capitalist development, but rather as being associated with specific historical social structures of accumulation, in particular the rise of mass industry. Indeed, it was the emergence of this new, more homogenized, class structure that drove employers to experiment with some of the divide-and-conquer methods covered in quadrant A.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Gerteis, *Class and the Color Line*.

⁸⁶ Satnam Virdee, *Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

⁸⁷ William P. Jones, *The Tribe of Black Ulysses: African American Lumber Workers in the Jim Crow South* (Champagne: UIP, 2005).

⁸⁸ Gordon et al., 112.

⁸⁹ Harold M. Baron, "The Demand for Black Labor: Historical Notes on the Political Economy of Racism," in *Workers' Struggles, Past and Present: A "Radical America" Reader*, ed. James Green (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), 24–61.

The second class dynamic contributing to interracial solidarity implicates the state and, in particular for this case, the transformations in class relations affected by the New Deal. The Works Progress Administration, the National Recovery Administration, and in general the broader relief regime tied together working-class people in new ways. The WPA united the unemployed from various industries into the category of relief recipients, many of whom subsequently organized together in the Workers' Alliance of America; the NRA, aside from legally wiping out some split labor market dynamics, also gave workers a clear set of rules broadly beneficial to workers irrespective of race that they could collectively enforce on their employers.⁹⁰

The following sections are organized by quadrant, following the labels A, C, D. I skip B, on account of the extended argument supporting that position throughout the rest of this work.

3A.1. Divide-and-conquer

Of the approaches to the problem of interracial conflict and solidarity taken up here, that of divide-and-conquer – sometimes mistakenly understood to be *the* Marxist approach (and hereafter D&C) – is concerned mainly with how elites adopt some racial strategy to break up or prevent working class organization.⁹¹ This is very broad, and a wide variety of D&C dynamics could be identified. Here I will describe three: D&C as the conscious strategy of capitalists and capitalist managers; D&C as the conscious strategy of political elites; and D&C as the functional-for-capital and therefore stable outcome of white workers' prejudices. Three subsections below will elaborate these variations.

⁹⁰ Chad A. Goldberg, "T.H. Marshall meets Pierre Bourdieu: Citizens and Paupers in the Development of the U.S. Welfare State," *Political Power and Social Theory* 19 (2008), 83-116; see also a similar observation by Jones, *Black Ulysses*, 90.

⁹¹ It is certainly *a* Marxist approach, as it is rooted in basic axiomatic principles in Marxist political economy – in particular, the problem of extraction of labor effort by employers at the point of production. But there are other approaches that are Marxist that emphasize the processes of ideological formation, for instance. Simply put, the question of the relationship of racism to class formation is not at all settled within the Marxist tradition.

3A.1.1. Divide-and-conquer as conscious employer strategy

The sense in which this approach is Marxist is that it rests on the premises that 1) the capitalist purchases from the worker their capacity to work over some period, rather than some predetermined amount of labor actually performed; and 2) that this entails antagonism at the point of the production in which the capitalist has an interest in extracting the most labor for the lowest cost attainable, and the worker has an interest in giving the least labor for the highest wages attainable; and 3) that the actual amount of labor extracted, and at what cost, is determined by the conflict between capitalists and the workers they hire. Because workers' capacity to force the capitalist to increase his investment in their wages and conditions or reduce the intensity of labor depends to such a large extent on whether they succeed in organizing collectively, capitalists have an abiding interest in sowing division among them.

D&C strategies by capitalist managers rooted in the ascribed status categories of workers – race, ethnicity, language, nationality, gender – were especially useful from the period beginning in the late 19th century and ending roughly around the mid-20th century. This period saw a pattern of capitalist development in which mechanization drove the homogenization of labor, brought together increasingly in large production facilities. Both the deskilling of workers and the destruction of their exclusive craft union organizations, while providing increases in profitability and control over the labor process for capitalists and their managers, also laid the conditions for renewed class conflict as more homogenized workers found fewer barriers to solidarity between them rooted in skill differentials and organizational divisions.⁹²

In this period, prior to the bureaucratization of industrial relations, when the method of controlling labor-power took the form of “factory despotism” through simple chain-of-command

⁹² Gordon et al., 121-127.

management, foremen and other immediate supervisors applied their folk knowledge and concepts of race to the control of the labor process. These front-line managers and plant superintendents relied on their impressions of racial groups' respective constitutions, dispositions, and habits to produce desired levels of industriousness among workers through segmenting and sorting workers by racial or ethnic category as they saw fit. Managers thus saw the usefulness of forms of heterogeneity provided not by the production process itself but by "nature." These "natural" differences might be leveraged in all sorts of ways to reduce workers' tendency to engage in shop floor resistance: making plantwide communication and coordination difficult, directly pitting groups against one another in competition for jobs, or increasing the direct reliance of workers on the employer.⁹³

The historical record abounds with anecdotal evidence of employer D&C strategies in this period. In some cases, employers believed the best system was to bring ethnic groups together into the same job or areas of the plant, to encourage their keeping to themselves and to ensure that any resistance to shop floor conditions would have difficulty spreading throughout the worksite. Thus, in the steel mills of South Chicago: "Italians were the unskilled laborers in bricklaying departments, Swedes manned the galvanizing departments, Poles provided the unskilled labor for the blast furnaces, and Croatians did the common labor in the finishing departments and rail mills".⁹⁴ When ethnic solidarity became a problem in the 1919 strike wave, as at International Harvester and Wisconsin Steel, managers simply changed tack, jumbling up all the ethnic groups such that none concentrated too much in any one job or section of the plant, allowing language barriers and cultural distance to break up organization within and not just between departments.⁹⁵ Employers not only manipulated the plantwide distribution

⁹³ David Roediger and Elizabeth D. Esch, *The Production of Difference: Race and the Management of Labor in U.S. History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 139-169.

⁹⁴ Elizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), 163.

⁹⁵ Cohen, 165-167. See also Baron, 40-45; Sterling D. Spero and Abram L. Harris, *The Black Worker: The Negro and the Labor Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931; repr., New York: Atheneum, 1968), 163.

of ethnic groups to undermine solidarity but sometimes directly concocted ethnic competition among workers. But even where they were not playing this “dirty trick”,⁹⁶ they recognized the value of keeping a “cosmopolitan” labor force in “[making] fraternizing among the employees difficult”.⁹⁷ Sometimes employers hatched grander schemes: Ford’s enormous River Rouge plant in the Detroit area adopted a policy of employing black workers in proportion to the size of their population in the surrounding area, winning Ford influence over many of the leading figures in Detroit’s black communities and their active collaboration in enforcing loyalty to Ford. The company studiously placed a few black workers in every production unit and allowed some to be promoted to skilled positions, but most were concentrated in the most onerous jobs. This insidious community-based approach not only imposed powerful social barriers to shop floor resistance for black workers, who risked antagonizing their own communities outside the plant in addition to the usual dangers, but also created loyalty among black workers by offering the hope of career advancement.⁹⁸ Finally, employers might appeal directly to white workers’ prejudices to persuade them not to organize. While the National Maritime Union was attempting to organize the sailors of the Pittsburgh Steamship Company – “the most formidable bastion of the open shop on the [Great] Lakes” -- the company distributed copies of a pamphlet the union used in some of its South Atlantic campaigns called *The NMU Fights Jim Crow*, along with letters from the company president and a reprint of an anti-NMU speech delivered to Congress. The vast majority of ship crews in the Great Lakes were all-white – “except for an occasional Negro in the galleys”, that is, working as a ship cook – and racist attitudes were common among Lake sailors. Along with all the standard bosses’ threats, ship captains distributed the NMU pamphlet among the sailors with the expectation that it

⁹⁶ Paul S. Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States: Chicago and the Calumet Region* 7, no. 2, University of California Publications in Economics (Berkeley: UCP, 1932): 93, quoted in Cohen, 197.

⁹⁷ Spero and Harris, 163.

⁹⁸ Baron, 43.

would sour them on the union, with one known to have told a NMU joiner, “If these Lake boats are organized they will have a bunch of niggers down here and you will have to work with them”.⁹⁹ The NMU indeed had a strong reputation for upholding racial integration, despite evidence of white rank-and-file resistance to the policy, and sponsored a sustained campaign of anti-racist education from whence came the anti-Jim Crow literature. In 1944, reflecting on failure to win the critical election at Pittsburgh Steamship, the NMU *Pilot* named the union’s unwillingness to ignore the centrality of integration to their organizing as one of four main causes for the election loss.¹⁰⁰

It is the mistaken identification of D&C in general with this specific mechanism – the vulgar manipulation of racial division by capitalists and their managers – that leads most analysts to see the D&C explanation as deeply inadequate to questions of race and class, especially in the contemporary period. If that were all there was to it, that would be fair enough. These tactics, it must be emphasized, are common, but they only rise to the level of *standard* management procedures in the US under a specific social structure of accumulation (homogenization of labor) in the history of capitalist development in the US. D&C dynamics may take place outside the narrow sphere of management tactics on the shopfloor. Still, on the Milwaukee waterfront, employers did not seem to be engaged in this sort of behavior regarding the longshoremen, and in any case, with the union's hiring hall, they were quite limited in the decisions over what men would be sent out. The role of these tactics in the Great Lakes NMU campaigns, however, calls for further research, and is especially intriguing given the fact that, starting in 1938, ILA 815 and the NMU local of the Wisconsin-Michigan Steamship Company traded

⁹⁹ Larowe, 62-63.

¹⁰⁰ Donald T. Critchlow, “Communist Unions and Racism: A Comparative Study of the Responses of United Electrical Radio and Machine Workers and the National Maritime Union to the Black Question During World War II,” *Labor History* 17, no. 2 (1976): 240.

sympathy strikes and respected one another's picket lines in the context of sharp conflicts between the ILA and NMU that had descended into riots on the New York waterfront the previous year.¹⁰¹

I turn now to D&C dynamics that operate independently of the purposeful manipulations of managers and employers.

3A.1.2. Divide-and-conquer as conscious strategy of political elites

It is reasonable to describe the overarching racial structure of the United States from the consolidation of racial slavery, and again with the rise and consolidation of Jim Crow, as having as its central motivation the division and political subordination of the working classes. The rationalization for the enslavement of Africans depended in the first instance on the construction of racial difference to mark blacks as uniquely unsuited to participate in the new republic's freedom.¹⁰² Later, the Jim Crow regime was in part a direct elite response to the upsurge of poor black and white Southern sharecroppers and tenant farmers, who had briefly and dramatically begun to unite in the Populist Party at the end of the 19th century, and which was designed to offer subordinate whites racial status privileges in exchange for their allegiance to the ruling class.¹⁰³ Hence one side of Du Bois's famous "public and psychological wage" formulation is a clear D&C claim: "Thus every problem of labor advance in the South was skillfully turned by demagogues into a matter of inter-racial jealousy..."¹⁰⁴

If D&C as employer strategy has a clearly bounded relevance within a particular period of capitalist development, D&C as political strategy runs as a thread throughout nearly the whole of American history beginning in the colonial period all the way up to the present. The specific ends elites

¹⁰¹ "Seamen Riot, Strike Looms on CIO Front," *Milwaukee Journal*, August 17, 1937, p. 29; "Dock Workers Back Sitdown," *Milwaukee Journal*, August 1, 1938, p. 1.

¹⁰² See, e.g., Barbara J. Fields, "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America," *New Left Review*, no. 181, May-June (1990): 106-108.

¹⁰³ C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: OUP, 1974; repr. 2002), 77-82.

¹⁰⁴ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1935; repr. New York: Free Press, 1998), 701.

are pursuing, the problems they are attempting to solve, and the potentialities they are attempting to head off may shift. Sometimes it is quite immediately “the labor question,” as in the case of the race-constructing Slave Codes in the colonial era and, two centuries later, the attempt to preserve the conditions of slavery as far as was possible under Jim Crow. Other times there are simply votes to be got by deliberately feeding whites’ racial anxieties and grievances, as with the GOP’s post-Civil Rights Era “Southern Strategy,” tough-on-crime and “law and order” rhetoric, and anti-welfare politics, largely carried on through “dog-whistle” language – the upshot of all this being the persistent undermining of interracial political coalitions for the waging of class struggle at the level of the state. The stinginess of the American welfare state is partially explained by such strategies and their tendency to reduce support for income-enhancing programs such as direct cash assistance and public education.¹⁰⁵

As far as the present case is concerned, the relevance of this aspect of D&C is unclear. The Socialist Party had significant support from black Milwaukeeans in the Thirties, and generally sought not to alienate the constituency, but also did not go out of their way for them. Patterns of racial housing segregation, including by way of explicitly racist exclusions such as restrictive covenants, began to take shape in the period of Socialist control. This negligence (at best) on the part of the Socialists became the inspiration for the defection of some black Socialists to the Communist Party. But it would not be until the immediate postwar years and the Fifties, when rapid black migration into the city took place, that anti-black racism would become a prominent feature of political campaigns. Confrontations over integrated housing during the postwar shortage and conflicts in particular over the placement and

¹⁰⁵ Reich’s influential study, discussed more below in 3.A.1.3., on the impact of racial wage inequality on overall wage levels also includes an analysis of the former’s effect on educational outcomes and welfare stipends. He finds that greater racial wage inequality corresponds to greater educational inequality *among whites* and lower AFDC payments. See: Michael Reich, “Who Benefits from Racism? The Distribution among Whites of Gains and Losses from Racial Inequality,” *The Journal of Human Resources* 13, no. 4 (1978): 539-541. For a canonical statement of the broad argument applied to American political development, see, e.g., Jill Quadagno, *The Color of Welfare: How Racism Undermined the War on Poverty* (Oxford: OUP, 1994).

character of public housing would take center stage. This culminated in an overtly racist campaign by Democratic mayoral candidate Milton McGuire in his campaign against Socialist incumbent Frank Zeidler in 1956, in which McGuire *blamed* Zeidler for the increase in the city's black population, spreading a rumor that the incumbent used the promise of public housing to lure Southern blacks to the city.¹⁰⁶

Milwaukee certainly earned its nickname as the Selma of the North in the postwar years. But the Depression era, while it was no interracial utopia, did not see the same sort of political uses of race.

3A.1.3. *Divide-and-conquer as differential exploitation*

A final variation on the D&C theme returns to the specific interests of capital in maintaining racial inequality as a profit-maximizing measure but does not depend on the purposeful manipulation of racial dynamics by capitalists. The argument begins again from the premises laid out in Section 2.1.1., that the cost and amount of labor effort extracted by the capitalist from the workers are the outcome of their conflict at the point of production, and that an increase in the bargaining power of workers reduces surplus labor extraction, all else equal. The level of workers' bargaining power varies in proportion to the strength of their organization. Capitalists are concerned to maximize profits, which depends in part on the reduction of workers' bargaining power, which depends in turn on containing or preventing workers' organization.

A brief contrast will help to clarify the argument. From the perspective of orthodox neoclassical economic theory, racial discrimination is unstable and unlikely to persist under competitive conditions because it is *inefficient* and therefore unprofitable. If capitalists find in the labor market two groups of workers who are equivalent with respect to their productivity but vary with respect to the price of labor, they will hire the low-wage labor or else be undercut by their competitors who do. Capitalists already

¹⁰⁶ Jim Arndorfer, "Cream City Confidential: The Black-Baiting of Milwaukee's Last Pink Mayor," *The Baffler* 13 (1999), <https://thebaffler.com/salvos/cream-city-confidential>.

employing the high-wage labor will release these workers to replace them with their low-wage counterparts. As unemployment in the high-wage group increases, their wages decline; as unemployment in the low-wage group declines, their wages increase. The competitive market “corrects” the wage differential across homogeneous workers as capitalists simply pursue to increase the efficiency of their investments. If capitalists engage in discrimination, then, it is either because they have a “taste” for it rooted in personal prejudice or because they are blocked by some other group from hiring freely.¹⁰⁷

A full critique of the orthodox neoclassical theory and its assumptions is out of order here. Suffice to say that the theory – assuming perfect information, zero transaction costs, and an absence of any power differentials in markets – does even account for the existence of the capitalist firm, let alone the relations of domination therein. Indeed, in the neoclassical approach, whether capital hires labor or labor hires capital makes no difference.¹⁰⁸ The Marxist approach, on the other hand, is centrally concerned with “the interactions between the voluntary relations of the marketplace and the command relationships of the workplace”.¹⁰⁹ In models that appreciate the real class structure of capitalism – capital hires labor and not the other way around, and the actual extraction of labor from the labor-power purchased is a problem that must be solved on the terrain of power relations *within firms* – *profit*-maximizing strategies cannot be seen as synonymous with *efficiency*-maximizing strategies. Capitalists are not first and foremost concerned with the most efficient use of resources but with profits,

¹⁰⁷ These are also, in essence, the implicit assumptions built into the split labor market approach, described below. The notion of employers’ “taste for discrimination” comes from Gary Becker, *The Economics of Discrimination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957).

¹⁰⁸ Paul Samuelson, “Wages and Interest: A Modern Dissection of Marxian Economic Models,” *American Economic Review* 47 (1957), 894.

¹⁰⁹ Samuel Bowles, “The Production Process in a Competitive Economy: Walrasian, Neo-Hobbesian, and Marxian Models,” *American Economic Review* 75, no. 1 (1985): 17.

and profit-maximization may well entail tolerable costs in terms of efficiency.¹¹⁰ Along these lines, contra neoclassical theory, it is possible in a competitive economy to have equilibria at which two groups of productively equivalent but racially distinct workers are paid different wages, and in which both are worse off as a result – hence, “divide-and-conquer”.¹¹¹

In these arguments it is the racial wage differential *itself* that reduces the likelihood of solidarity among workers. The argument is essentially agnostic regarding the specific mechanisms by which it happens that there are two or more productively equivalent, racially distinct groups of workers in a labor market whose wages differ; the essential point is that it does not rely on the claim that employers are *responsible* for concocting or manipulating the division. The implications of this variation of D&C may be stated thus: The greater the wage inequality along racial lines, *whatever its cause*, the lower are the absolute wages of the relatively privileged workers, because this inequality undermines workers’ organization and therefore reduces their bargaining power.¹¹² Capitalists therefore benefit because they capture more of the labor as surplus, not only from super-exploited black workers but also from the relatively-less exploited workers whose wages are lower than they would be under conditions of greater racial equality.¹¹³ For this inequality to be an effective barrier to interracial organizing, however, the model assumes some ideological tendency among workers to be so divided.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ See, e.g., Michael Reich and James Devine, “The Microeconomics of Conflict and Hierarchy in Capitalist Production,” *Review of Radical Political Economics* 12, no. 4 (1981): 27–45; and especially Mark Gould, “The Reproduction of Labour Market Discrimination in Competitive Capitalism” in *Exploitation and Exclusion: Race and Class in Contemporary US Society*, ed. Abebe Zegeye, Leonard Harris, and Julia Maxted (London: Hans Zell Publishers, 1991), 114.

¹¹¹ John Roemer, “Divide and Conquer: Microfoundations of a Marxian Theory of Wage Discrimination,” *The Bell Journal of Economics* 10, no. 2 (1979), 703.

¹¹² Reich, “Who Benefits”, 525.

¹¹³ Bowles also suggests that such inequality benefits capitalists not only by the reduction of workers’ bargaining position but also by the reduction of employers’ monitoring costs (29-31).

¹¹⁴ Gould, 115.

That assumption, of course, raises the question of why workers pick up that ideological tendency, and the broader question of workers' role in the process. Indeed, historically, we find no shortage of white workers' initiative in the production of racial divisions. If workers are divided-and-conquered, they play some active role in maintaining the division and clearing the path for their conquerors.

At the municipal level, there can simply be no doubt that white workers made more on average than black workers in Milwaukee after controlling for skill differences, on account of patterns of exclusion from skilled and semi-skilled occupations. Black workers were still frequently shut out of such jobs. The position of Milwaukee compared to other cities in this regard is not known; but in any case, the relative aggregate position is less relevant to the particular case of the longshoremen, who were classified as unskilled and were in some respects the rock-bottom of the labor market. Here, there were not major systematic wage inequalities across racial lines (wage data presented in chapter 4).

3A.2. Split labor markets

The theory of the racially split labor market (hereafter SLM) is perhaps the best-known sociological approach to explaining interracial conflict among workers. SLM, first proposed by Edna Bonacich, outlines the labor market conditions under which working-class racial conflict becomes likely: where labor markets contain at least two groups of workers "whose price of labor differs for the same work, or would differ if they did the same work," and where that differential corresponds to preexisting, already-constituted racial or ethnic groups.¹¹⁵ The key factors determining the extent of wage differentials along ethnic or racial lines are the distribution of resources, especially economic resources and information,

¹¹⁵ Edna Bonacich, "A Theory of Ethnic Antagonism: The Split Labor Market," *American Sociological Review* 37, no. 5 (1972): 549.

and differences in the motivation for entering and remaining in the labor force – for instance, subsistence farmers entering the labor market on a seasonal basis for supplemental income or migrant sojourners looking to work for a limited period of time before returning to their home country, versus those seeking permanent employment. Workers with low levels of resources or information about alternatives are more vulnerable, and therefore more difficult to organize and more likely to accept low wages. On the other hand, workers who are fundamentally motivated by short-term fortune-seeking or income supplementation are unlikely to form or join workers' organizations that seek to increase wages, and indeed are likely to turnover even more quickly if wages do increase, having more quickly obtained the supplemental income sought. Splits in the labor market develop along these lines, and (to reiterate) where they emerge along ethnic or racial lines, the labor market is ethnically or racially split.

Ethnic/racial antagonism stems from the presence of such splits in the labor market. Higher-paid workers face the threat of being undercut by the lower-paid; the lower-paid are difficult to organize, owing either to their vulnerability or their short-term motivations. Rather than attempt to organize such workers, higher-paid workers will therefore tend to adopt either a strategy of excluding the lower-paid ethnic group from the labor market altogether or, if the group cannot be excluded outright, a strategy of establishing a caste system with respect to the job.¹¹⁶ Such strategies, as a cursory review of the relevant literature will confirm, are often executed with violent tactics. The model assumes that employers have no special interest in racial division and will simply seek to higher the cheapest available labor without discrimination (as in the neoclassical assumptions outlined above). Beyond this, workers

¹¹⁶ The term "caste system" is used by Bonacich to describe, for example, the establishment of a racial job hierarchy within an industry, the use of color bars to preserve access to certain jobs as the prerogative of white men, and so on. She explicitly does not aim to enter the conceptual or theoretical debates about whether race in America should be understood as a caste system *in general*, and does not claim that it should. Along the same lines, use of the term here should not be seen in any connection to the 2020 publication of Isabel Wilkerson's *Caste* and the debate around it.

“sort it out” among themselves as white workers attempt to ward off non-white workers with violence and intimidation, or threaten employers with strikes or other disruptions if the latter attempt to violate customary color bars; and as excluded non-white workers attempt to gain from the conflict between white workers and capitalists.

The matter of employers’ use of black strikebreakers is both a case in point, and draws attention to a curious observation not easily explained by SLM. Black workers, formally excluded by most labor unions and thereby blocked from entering most jobs, had no reason to respect a union picket line and two good reasons to cross one: income and race pride. Employers often sought to break strikes with black strikebreakers in hopes that this would not only keep production going through the strike, but because they knew that the white workers adopted a particularly hostile stance toward black people and hoped to drive them to violence, thereby inviting the intervention of the state as a “peacekeeping” force in the labor dispute. In just such a way did black workers enter many of the trades from which white workers attempted to exclude them – including, probably, the Milwaukee longshoreman in this study.¹¹⁷

In this connection it is interesting to note the symbolic dimension. Employers were not the authors of racist ideology on the blank slates of their employees’ minds; they felt they could take advantage of a racist ideology already present. The threat of the black strikebreaker was an element of this ideology and could even perhaps be considered one of the important tropes constituting the cast of characters populating white racial ideology in the 19th and early 20th centuries. As much as the kind and dedicated “Mammy,” the carefree and irresponsible “Sambo,” the dangerous and savage “Mandingo,” the “Black Strikebreaker” articulated the economic and racial anxieties of white workers. And, like the

¹¹⁷ Vrana, 20-21.

other characters, the Black Strikebreaker was an exaggeration of staggering proportions. Whatley's study on black strikebreaking found that the practice was not especially extensive, and generally increased only when an adequate supply of white migrant worker strikebreakers was unavailable.¹¹⁸ Despite the far more widespread use of immigrants or other whites as strikebreakers, "the terms 'scab' and 'Negro' were synonymous" for white workers.¹¹⁹ A similar problem emerges in another context: increases in the rate of *European* migration had a significant impact on the increase in attacks on black people in American cities in the years from 1880-1914, suggesting that whites displaced economic anxieties about immigrants onto native-born blacks.¹²⁰ The figure of the black worker seemed to loom in the not-so-deep recesses of the white mind as a repository for economic anxieties irrespective of their real source. A strict SLM approach cannot account for this.

There are two observations about the Milwaukee scene on this score. The first is that the Milwaukee Garveyite group openly organized to prevent the importation of strikebreakers into the city. It is not known to what extent white Milwaukee knew this, but the Garveyite organization was quite large and influential in Milwaukee into the Thirties, and white unionists may well have taken note. The second is that during that decade the black male labor force shrank by half, from 2,797 in 1930 to 1,382 in 1940, as employment opportunities dried up in the city. The proportion of black workers in domestic and personal service work from 13 to 23 percent, losing ground in unskilled manufacturing occupations. These figures would suggest that strong split labor market conditions did not characterize the Milwaukee labor market.

¹¹⁸ Warren C. Whatley, "African-American Strikebreaking from the Civil War to the New Deal," *Social Science History* 17, no. 4 (1993): 541-42; 548-49.

¹¹⁹ Baron, 39.

¹²⁰ Susan Olzak, "Labor Unrest, Immigration, and Ethnic Conflict in Urban America, 1880-1914," *American Journal of Sociology* 94, no. 6 (1989): 1328.

3A.3. White supremacist ideology

There is no shortage of historical examples of white workers and their organizations upholding racist, white supremacist ideology, and this was definitely a barrier to unity. An exemplary and concise statement of this position is Michael Goldfield's "Class, Race, and Politics in the United States: White Supremacy as the Main Explanation for the Peculiarities of American Politics from Colonial Times to the Present." He argues that white supremacist ideology had the effect – largely though not entirely through the leadership of working-class institutions – of maintaining and institutionalizing racial division in the working class, which in turn explains the endemic weakness of labor in US politics.¹²¹ This is demonstrated through an analysis of critical historical turning points in the process of working-class formation. These are the failure of the early labor movement to concern itself with the problem of slavery and its aloofness to abolitionism before the Civil War, and its failure to change course with regard to the freedmen after the war; the response by whites in the Southern Populist movement to abandon interracial projects under the weight of repression, and by Populist leaders to enthusiastically endorse the emerging Jim Crow system; the left's demotion of anti-racist work in favor of seeking alliances with New Deal Dixiecrats and mainstream liberal forces during the era of the Popular Front; and the backlash of white workers against the Civil Rights Movement, finally culminating in the rise to power of the far right in the form of the Reagan Administration.

In other words, at various key moments in which there were major opportunities for broad class-based agitation and organization – the Civil War, Reconstruction, the Populist moment, the New Deal era, the Civil Rights era – white supremacist ideology acted as a brake on white workers' willingness to seize any of these opportunities.

¹²¹ Goldfield, 119.

It is certainly true that any history that fails to appreciate the prevalence and impact of racism among American workers is incomplete to the point of distortion. Yet it does not follow that white supremacist ideology is always the best way to explain the failure to establish and expand practices of interracial solidarity in the labor movement in all these critical periods. For one thing, episodes of interracial solidarity generally involved whites with racist ideas. They were driven, under certain conditions, to pursue solidarity *despite* their racist ideology. The experience of class struggle might lead workers to question and even reject racist ideology in some cases, but that experience depends on the establishment of unity. There would be many fewer examples of interracial working-class solidarity if an *absence* of racist ideology were a necessary condition for its emergence.¹²²

Second, the actual processes resulting in the failure of interracial formations are clearly different across these critical historical turning points. A major factor in the decline of Southern Populism was that white and black Populists endured extraordinary and severe repression at the hands of lynch mobs, often sanctioned by state officials; these white Populists would frequently have held racist views, of course, but would they have abandoned their political project absent such repression? Very different circumstances explain, for instance, the labor and left radicals' turn away from direct and consistent confrontation with American racism in the 1930s. Perhaps as many Communist Party members were afflicted with "white chauvinism," as the Party put it, in 1925 as in 1935. A better explanation for the shift is the party's sharp turn to the political mainstream and a desire to "Americanize" the party

¹²² Letwin's *The Challenge of Interracial Unionism* provides highly illustrative historical examples of complicated dynamics of conflict and solidarity among white and black workers in the Alabama coal mines in era from the end of Reconstruction to the end of World War I. Black and white workers would find themselves in pitched battle amongst themselves one day and on the same side of a picket line soon after. They also occasionally found interracial unity in trying to exclude other ethnic minorities. Dock workers also exhibit a complex history of conflict and solidarity across racial lines; see, e.g., Nelson's *Divided We Stand*. Indeed, these histories make a strict conceptual separation of conflict and solidarity difficult to sustain, because solidaristic outcomes are not characterized by the absence of intergroup conflict, but by the reorganization and channelization of conflict into more manageable forms.

following Party Chairman Earl Browder's interpretation of the Comintern's "popular front" policy of 1934 – not a shift in the intensity of the white supremacist ideology carried by Communist Party members or leaders.

In what way are these two things similar? In the former, the actors were motivated by a desire to avoid the extreme costs of state and vigilante repression; in the latter, they wanted to take advantage of new political opportunities to build alliances with moderates and were instructed by their prestigious international leadership in Moscow to do so. The two processes certainly share an outcome: leading radical forces (Populists, Communists) abandoned or demoted a commitment to building interracial working-class solidarity. But the shared outcome does not imply a shared cause – white supremacist ideology is present in both cases, but in what sense can it be said to be at the core of the explanation in either case?

One possible interpretation presents itself: the ideology of white supremacy acts, at all times and across historical periods, as a background condition making any interracial class project more vulnerable. Here the precipitating events or processes or proximal causes may be diverse, as suggested above, but the ultimate or distal cause of white supremacist ideology gives all of them a higher probability of producing the result of failed solidarity. In other words: White supremacist ideology made it *more likely* that repression would drive the Southern Populist movement to abandon its interracial project *than would otherwise have been the case*; white supremacist ideology made it *more likely* that new political opportunities and organizational pressures would drive Communist activists to deprioritize confronting racism *than would otherwise have been the case*, perhaps. The claim rendered in this form strikes me as clearly plausible, indeed practically unimpeachable: the ubiquity of racist ideas no doubt makes interracial solidarity more tenuous across various contexts. Yet this does not seem sufficient to

posit racism *as such* as the mainspring of US labor's weakness – or, at least, it fails to tell us what we do not already know.

3A.4. Whiteness

A strain of historical literature on class and race in the United States has emphasized the importance of “whiteness” as a dividing line and barrier to interracial class solidarity. Whiteness includes the problem of white supremacist ideology but is more broadly concerned with the cultural and material benefits that accrue to those identified as white, and the way these real (and, perhaps, imagined) benefits shape the identity, priorities, and motivations of such people.

An insight from W.E.B. Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction*, in which he considers the causes of racial division among poor whites and blacks, illustrates the basic ideas in the “whiteness studies” research agenda:

It must be remembered that the white group of laborers, while they received a low wage, were compensated in part by a sort of public and psychological wage. They were given public deference and titles of courtesy because they were white. They were admitted freely with all classes of white people to public functions, public parks, and the best schools. The police were drawn from their ranks, and the courts, dependent upon their votes, treated them with such leniency as to encourage lawlessness. Their vote selected public officials, and while this had small effect upon the economic situation, it had great effect upon their personal treatment and the deference shown them. White schoolhouses were the best in the community, and conspicuously placed, and they cost anywhere from twice to ten times as much per capita as the colored schools. The newspapers specialized on news that flattered the poor whites and almost utterly ignored the Negro except in crime and ridicule.

On the other hand, in the same way, the Negro was subject to public insult....

Mob violence and lynching were the inevitable result of the attitude of these two classes and for a time were a sort of permissible Roman holiday for the entertainment of vicious whites. One can see for these reasons why labor organizers and labor agitators made such small headway in the South. They were, for the most part, appealing to laborers who would rather have low wages...than see colored labor with a decent wage.¹²³

¹²³ Du Bois, 700-01.

The point, then, is not merely that whites have a proclivity toward racist ideology. Rather, they come to have a material stake in identification with whiteness. New migrants to the United States also developed a powerful interest in attaining white classification on account of the Naturalization Act of 1906 which stipulated that only “free white persons” could become citizens of the United States – not to mention a plethora of more informal inducements.¹²⁴ It was this legal regime around migration and citizenship, along with the clear designation of blacks first as potential slaves and then as second-class citizens, that motivated the process of “becoming white” and the expansion of the category “white” to include persons descended from virtually any ethnic or national group in the whole of Europe.¹²⁵

Whiteness studies largely began with this basic insight from Du Bois, extending it to emphasize the *agency* of European-Americans in their own racial definition and worldview. That is, whiteness studies scholars emphasize the problem of white *self*-identification, or identity. Roediger’s *The Wages of Whiteness* is the classic illustration of this approach. In his interrogation of the rhetorical practices of working-class organizations and popular forms of entertainment, particularly blackface minstrelsy, Roediger argues that European-American workers themselves shaped the meaning of whiteness in their struggles to reconcile themselves to the growing wage-labor system and its industrial discipline. Permanent relegation to wage-labor obliterated their hopes of attaining the republican ideal of freedom through property ownership and independence; contrasting themselves against enslaved blacks made their status position more tolerable at least by comparison. European-American workers thus chose to respond to their economic fears and anxieties through the creation and demeaning of a racialized

¹²⁴ “Aliens of African nativity and persons of African descent” could also become citizens under the 1906 Naturalization Act, making it possible for African and Caribbean migrants to attain citizenship. Migrants from the European periphery, the Middle East, and South and East Asia would, of course, neither qualify for nor seek to be categorized as “persons of African descent,” but would rather seek to be classified as white. *Takao Ozawa v. United States* (1922) and *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* (1923) were foundational cases in this regard, withholding “whiteness”, which is to say the rights of citizenship, from East Asians and South Asians respectively.

¹²⁵ The classic study of this process is Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

“other,” through which their own self-identity was formed. Moreover, the highly regimented and disciplinary lifestyle imposed on the new American proletarians created both an intense desire and disdain for a “preindustrial, erotic, careless” past; the production and consumption of blackface minstrel shows served to express these contradictory drives, and allowed European-Americans to live vicariously through an idealized and degraded image of black life that embodied preindustrial ways, while simultaneously distancing themselves and establishing themselves as more advanced and more civilized.¹²⁶

The “whiteness” approach is most at its best when dealing with certain problems in the cultural and intellectual history in the US: the gradual transformation of the subjectivity of European settlers and migrants; the process whereby such racial categories as Celt, Mediterranean, Iberian, and Slavic make way for “Caucasian” and white; the rise of “ethnicity” as a softer form of distinction among these once-racialized groupings; the ways that the economic, legal, and political regime gave “the in-between peoples” powerful incentives to be perceived and designated as white; and how these peoples sought entry into this designation.¹²⁷

Yet, even apart from more fundamental criticisms of the whiteness literature, the approach is generally pitched at too general a level to capture the dynamics of solidarity and fragmentation at the concrete, local level.¹²⁸ So, the immigrants “become white” – and then what? Barbara Fields offered an

¹²⁶ Roediger, *Wages*, 14.

¹²⁷ See, e.g.: Cheryl I. Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (1993): 1758–61; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); David Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America’s Immigrants Became White: the Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).

¹²⁸ See Eric Arnesen, “Whiteness and the Historians’ Imagination,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 60 (2001): 3. Arnesen argued that the whole enterprise of whiteness studies was rent by a lack of conceptual clarity as to what constitutes “whiteness”, a misreading of Du Bois’ original formulation of the “public and psychological wage”, failure to establish the basic claim that European immigrant groups were “not white” in any sense, and a lack of grounding in archival or other empirical evidence.

especially sharp criticism along these lines: Many European immigrants to the United States walked into a world already defined in terms of black and white, already themselves defined as white without having lifted a finger – no “agency” required. “Whiteness is consequently a mixed bag,” she writes, “whose contents might...be the use of the word *nigger* in children’s games [or] the wielding of bludgeon, torch, and firearm in pogroms against Afro-Americans. The first, as David Roediger illustrates by the example of his own boyhood [in his introduction to *The Wages of Whiteness*] could coexist with admiration for Curt Flood, Bob Gibson, Lou Brock, Muhammad Ali, Tina Turner, and Smokey Robinson; it might even eventuate in authorship of *The Wages of Whiteness...*”.¹²⁹ Here the point is that the discursive practices Roediger identifies as the evidence of European-Americans’ working toward whiteness seems to mean little in the way of answering the actual question posed: Out of this “mixed bag” of racial practices, what explains various patterns of division, conflict, or solidarity across racial lines? Indeed, the fact that these groups become white only establishes the premise that there is some binary white/black division created, rather than a dense fog of mutually hostile or indifferent national and ethnic groups. The question, “under what conditions does interracial working-class organization succeed or fail,” *presumes* that racialization has already taken place, at least to some extent.

While the whiteness approach acts as a corrective to an overly top-down interpretation of the source of racial beliefs and practices, and to an older historiographical tradition of essentially ignoring racial division, its adherents run the risk of bending the stick too far in the other direction: European-Americans built whiteness; now they are trapped inside it. “Agency” created whiteness which now destroys agency. Racial division and conflict in this light becomes a little too obvious and unproblematic; the moments of interracial solidarity a little too curious and unexpected. On the contrary: those with a

¹²⁹ Barbara J. Fields, “Whiteness, Racism, and Identity,” *International Labor and Working Class History*, no. 60 (2001): 52.

white racial identity may prioritize that identity against others, or not; and they may try to mobilize others or themselves be mobilized to act based on that identity, or not. They may intervene in the social world along other lines – those, say, of class, occupation, religion, or political ideology. Finally, they may behave in a way that the whiteness approach would predict – e.g., eschewing interracial solidarity – but for reasons other than, or not best understood as, whiteness.

The problems with both the whiteness approach and that of top-down white supremacist leadership discussed in the previous section are similar: both seem basically true but incapable of explaining the observed variation or getting past question-begging. Of the white longshoremen, only John Brzek left behind any substantial record of his inner life. Indeed, he exhibits white supremacist assumptions and behaviors when, in the Fifties, he explicitly refused to hire Mexicans on the docks because, with white and black longshoremen getting along, he didn't "need another faction" that might "cause an explosion". At the same time, in 1956, Brzek saw to the expulsion of four white men for their "attitudes and remarks towards the colored race," on the grounds that "disrupting this union through acts of discrimination" could not be tolerated.¹³⁰ The apparent contradiction seems to come down to an essential racial pragmatism on Brzek's part; indeed, this would be consistent with the approach to racial questions by the ILA generally, as elaborated in the next chapter.

3C.1. Demographic explanations for solidarity

Turning to effects of racial dynamics on class that tend to make solidarity more likely, the most straightforward explanation is essentially demographic in nature. The short of it is that what is key to development of interracial organization in a given industry or firm is the race relations obtaining in the

¹³⁰ Chybowski, 56; 97.

industry or firm at the time of the unionization effort. For instance, the presence early on of large concentrations of black workers in ports and mines meant that they were able to establish footholds in these industries and were present when the first organizing took place. This interpretation is at least implicit in Arnesen's study of New Orleans longshoremen, and in Letwin's study of Alabama miners. Jones makes a similar sort of argument more explicitly about Southern lumber workers. Where black and white workers were roughly equal in number in a given workplace, there emerged genuine interracial unionism; where whites were outnumbered, black unionists could maintain a labor organization against white workers' resistance to it; where whites are in the majority, there emerged a biracial unionism with segregated black locals or black auxiliaries strongly subordinated to the white organization. These patterns corresponded respectively to the lumber mills in Chapman, AL; Elizabethtown, NC; and Bogalusa, LA.¹³¹

The necessary addendum to this is that white workers must either have no ability or no desire – more realistically the former – to simply oust black workers from their position in the industry. Demographic starting conditions did not necessarily protect black workers' jobs in industries where they had a long history of employment. For instance, in New York, where black longshoremen had once enjoyed relatively stable access to employment, a concerted effort by Irish newcomers succeeded in driving them off the docks in the 19th century.¹³² Frederick Douglass's famous narrative describes a similar scene among shipbuilders in Baltimore where he worked:

Until a very little while after I went [to work at the shipyard], white and black ship-carpenters worked side by side, and no one seemed to see any impropriety in it. All hands seemed to be satisfied. Many of the black carpenters were freemen. Things seemed to be going on very well. All at once, the white carpenters knocked off, and said they would not work with free colored workmen. Their reason for this, as alleged, was that if free colored carpenters were encouraged,

¹³¹ Jones, 151-152.

¹³² Nelson, 13-16.

they would soon take the trade into their own hands, and poor white men would be thrown out of employment.¹³³

The best demonstration of this countertrend to the demographic argument is probably the South in the immediate postbellum years. At the conclusion of the Civil War, over *eighty percent* of Southern artisans were black, but the subsequent generation saw a massive encroachment by white labor on historically black-dominated crafts. By 1890, black workers comprised only sixteen percent of carpenters, twenty-eight percent of masons, eleven percent of painters, twenty percent of blacksmiths, and other similar declines.¹³⁴

Similar demographic beginnings can lead to diametrically opposed outcomes by quite equally plausible mechanisms. For instance, where black workers comprise only a small minority, it is possible that they will be organized in the manner described by Jones — that is to say, in such a way that they are formally included in the union but on a subordinated basis, and possibly by way of a segregated auxiliary local. On the other hand, it is also possible that black workers being in the minority reduces the potential of a racial threat effect, in which case white workers will feel as though they have nothing to fear from black coworkers participating fully and equally in union affairs, even electing blacks to leadership bodies on the basis of demonstrated commitment to unionism and competency in

¹³³ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 62.

¹³⁴ Spero and Harris, 159-60; 169. They also present charts comparing *nationwide* black membership figures in sixty-four AFL unions in 1900, 1910, and 1928 (76-78). Of these, only twenty-four had any black members listed for either 1900 or 1910. Of these twenty-four, seventeen saw a decline in the number of black members between those years and 1928. Some of these were drastic: from 5,000 to 110 black cigar makers from 1910-28; from 2,700 to 150 firemen and oilers from 1900-28; from 6,000 to 313 teamsters, chauffeurs, and stablemen from 1910-28; and from 1000 to 100 tobacco workers from 1900-28. Less drastic declines (or increases are often explained by very low initial figures, e.g., from four to two granite cutters, or six to forty-three printing pressmen and assistants. It is worth noting in this connection the relative stability of the longshoremen's figure: from 1900 to 1928, the number of black union longshoremen declined from 6,000 to 5,381. In some cases, of course, declines have to do with the fate of whole trades — for instance, the decline from 500 to zero carriage and wagon makers, is a clear example of this phenomenon. The Twenties also saw a general decline in union membership as the labor movement was politically defeated and repressed. Still, the overall picture is one of declining numbers of black tradesmen as craft unions succeed not only in barring new entrants, but excluding men already plying the trade.

leadership. At the massive Allis-Chalmers plant in Milwaukee, for instance, Stephen Meyer describes how black committeemen and stewards were elected in UAW 248 when black workers still represented a minute proportion of the workforce, despite what he describes as an inhospitable terrain on account of a strongly German, Slavic, and Polish workforce – ethnic groups who he estimated to be less tolerant of black workers in the Thirties and Forties.¹³⁵ The small number of black workers in the plant and in the city at large may well have been a condition, along with strong support from the leadership, for their winning rank-and-file support. Both tendencies, at any rate, are attested in the historical literature.

Still, the pattern as Jones calls it in lumber seems to basically hold true as well in Southern waterfront work and mining. The proportion of black workers on the Milwaukee waterfront – not half, but a third – may have been high enough, and white workers weak enough, that exclusion was simply not a realistic option.

3C.2. Independent black power and the role of the 'racialized other'

Another explanation for the emergence of interracial class solidarity is the presence of some source of independent strength for black workers in or out of the labor movement. In his book comparing Richmond at Atlanta in the late 19th century, Gerteis argues that the success of the Knight of Labor in Richmond is attributable to the presence of a thriving black civil society in that city and the capacity of black communities to ensure representation on the city government by the election of black alders.

These in turn depended on a pattern of racial segregation in the city that created dense concentrations of black residents that could numerically dominate city wards and reduce the capacity for surveillance

¹³⁵ Stephen Meyer, "New Workers, New Problems: The Social Upheaval of Defense Production," in *Work, Class, and Power: The Making and Unmaking of a 'Red' UAW Local at Allis-Chalmers, 1930-1950* (unpublished manuscript, n.d.), 33-34. This work is the manuscript on which Meyer's (1992) *Stalin Over Wisconsin* was based, and it contains a great deal of material not included in the latter published work. I am deeply grateful to him for having gifted this original manuscript to me.

by whites. Black civil society organizations are important for the development of interracial solidarity for three main reasons. The first of these is the training of personnel who go on to form and lead black labor organizations and more broadly the development of a tradition of self-organization. Second, while it was more likely to be elite members of the black community — and not workers — participating in most civil society groups, some organizations such as churches were joined *en masse* and were genuinely popular institutions, and if nothing else served as informal hubs which served uses both holy and worldly. Thirdly, and most crucially for Gerteis, the presence of black civil society organizations in urban communities demonstrated to white workers that blacks were capable of civic virtue and the fulfillment of republican expectations of true citizenship, and thus could be trusted and cooperated with.¹³⁶ The depth of republicanism and the ideology of civic virtue are widely noted by historians of the labor movement and indeed have often been charged with undermining real class consciousness in the American working class. Nevertheless, as Gerteis demonstrates, white workers were much more likely to choose cooperation with black workers in urban centers where the former had already become accustomed to an independent black organizational presence — where, in other words, there was an organizational force that white workers would have to negotiate with, and which could insist on demands.¹³⁷

In his work, Virdee makes a quite distinct but highly complementary argument in the British context. He emphasizes the role of ‘racialized outsiders’ in acting as the carriers within the working class of an anti-racist and internationalist politics in working class organizations, tending to reduce the impact of racial or ethnic intraclass differentiation. The subjugation of these groups — principally Irish Catholics,

¹³⁶ It was often recent immigrants — especially Chinese, but also Poles, Hungarians, and Italians — who were especially identified by the Knights of Labor as lacking republican virtue. Their relationship to black workers was more complex, but less simply hostile than to these immigrant groups; see Gerteis, 40; 62-67.

¹³⁷ Gerteis, e.g.: 11-13; 74-75; 77; 99-101.

Jews, Africans, West Indians, and South Asians — and their symbolic exclusion from the elite-led attempt to build and shore up nationalism in support of imperialist projects ‘helped inform their relative lack of enthusiasm for, and commitment to, the dominant politics and representations of the British nation once in Britain’.¹³⁸ Virdee’s approach also stands out for emphasizing the history of the class struggle in Britain in the explanation of the racial trajectory of British class formation. Rather than the mere presence or absence of determinants, the experience of harrowing defeats for the working-class movement were central to the choices the movement would make in the following rounds. The failure of the 1832 Reform Act and the decisive trouncing of the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union led workers to see the benefits of adopting a national rather than class-based identity — allowing themselves to be “integrated horizontally on the axis of nation” with national elites — was one such episode. The defeat of Chartism, a movement that had emerged in the 1830s and 40s with strong Irish and African participation in its leadership, was another. Yet another was the dissolution of the Socialist League in the late 19th century. This organization had adopted a socialist nationalism that drew its boundaries to include Irish workers but largely excluded Jewish workers, thus providing virtually no resistance to the rise of working class antisemitism and the laying of the path for an alliance “between east end workers and back-bench Tory MPs”.¹³⁹ Virdee’s interpretation thus also indicates the necessity for sensitivity to elite nationalist and imperialist projects. Such an interpretation dovetails with an observation made by C. Vann Woodward about American history, in which the racist rationalizations for US imperial expansion, deployed liberally by Northern elites, undermined opposition to the emerging Jim Crow systems in the South which were, of course, rationalized in much the same terms.¹⁴⁰ Such

¹³⁸ Virdee, 24.

¹³⁹ Virdee, 53.

¹⁴⁰ Woodward, 72-74.

projects tend to drive ethnic outsiders — direct or indirect targets of such nationalist rhetoric — to a stronger “attachment to the politics of proletarian internationalism” by cutting them out of identification with the nation.¹⁴¹

More detailed explorations of these themes are undertaken in chapters 3 and 4. Suffice to say here that the case is at least broadly consistent with these two approaches. Residential segregation was far enough advanced in Milwaukee that the black community could, and did, focus its political efforts on contesting for power in a single aldermanic ward. The efforts were not ultimately successful — not because the black community was insufficiently mobilized, but because it was internally differentiated enough to have enthusiastic competing factions.¹⁴² One measure of residential isolation that serves as Gerteis's necessary indicator of the black community coherence necessary to support political organization is comparable for black Milwaukeeans in the Sixth Ward.

As for 'racialized outsiders', black workers in Milwaukee were instrumental to spreading the Communist Party's influence beyond the foreign language federations and fusing its social democratic ambitions with racial and ethnic egalitarianism, helping to expand the reach of the ecosystem of liberal-progressive-labor-left organizations and movements in terms of its constituency and political and moral commitments.¹⁴³ Indeed, in the ILA 815, the only two confirmed Communist Party members were such

¹⁴¹ Virdee, 72.

¹⁴² Trotter, 133-39.

¹⁴³ Discussed further in Chapter 3.

'outsiders' – Scott Watson, black, and David Altman, Jewish.¹⁴⁴ Aaron Toliver – whose membership in the party remains only alleged and unconfirmed – was clearly committed to Popular Front causes, as many leftists and liberals were. His activities will be covered in depth in Chapter 5.

3D. Economic and Political Homogenization

The basic idea behind the notion of economic homogenization is summarized above in 3A.1.1., describing the era of capitalist development in which capitalists and managers began seeking out ways to break up actual and potential forms of solidarity arising out of the new organization of work that they had created in the first half of the twentieth century.

While the argument is meant to apply in an aggregate sense to a particular historical social structure of accumulation in the development of capitalism, the same principle applies in the analysis of specific industries or even workplaces: where the production process imposes largely uniform experiences and interests on workers, there are lower barriers to organization. Most of the men in ILA 815 would have been engaged in broadly similar kinds of work, the main difference being whether they were loading and unloading cargo on railcars, ships' holds, or warehouses. Contracts for these three different categories give some rudimentary sense of the extent of their internal homogeneity.

Depending on the specific employer, boat contracts note the distinctions of housemen, coopers, hand truckers, stowers, automobile drivers, steam winch boom hoist operators, and electric hoist operators;

¹⁴⁴ Sidney Peck's (1963) excellent study on the ideologies of shop stewards in Milwaukee, *The Rank-and-File Leader*, makes careful observation of stewards' racial attitudes, finding clear evidence of the persistence of prejudice – albeit couched in the defensive denials and excuses characteristic of postwar liberalism and what Bonilla-Silva (2003) would later call colorblind racism – toward both black and Jewish people (166-76). One also catches an undeniable whiff of casual antisemitism in post-1942 leader John Brzek's correspondence with R.A. Walton, ILA International Vice President: "The two Jew lawyers Nugent [one of the main waterfront employers – MB] was connected with formed their own company, and are out to cut Nugent's throat... They are also cutting our throat, as they send men to work for 95¢ per hour, our scale is \$1.10, but we intend to stop them in Milwaukee..." (ILA 815 Records, Folder 5, Box 12, John Brzek to R.A. Walton, August 18, 1948).

wages are equalized for all categories but the hoist operators, who were paid at a higher rate.

Warehouse contracts name in-house warehousemen, checkers, truckers, and outside dock men, all paid the same. The car gang contracts indicate no internal differentiation whatsoever, either in terms of job tasks or wages.

Straightforward interpretation of these features of the different work gangs, however, is complicated by the fact that there was mobility across jobs and employers. In the end, I cannot draw firm conclusions about how homogeneous the work experience actually was for Local 815 members. It is interesting to note, however, that the original initiative for unionization of the Milwaukee waterfront came from the more highly differentiated boat gangs, while one of the local's most significant early struggles came out of the car gangs. Warehousemen were not organized until 1936-37, and fewer significant confrontations with employers seemed to emerge from this group.¹⁴⁵

Sociologists emphasizing the role of the state point out the way some policies and agencies create new constituencies that can lay the basis for new solidarities to emerge. A key example of interest for interracial solidarity is the new constituencies created by New Deal policies. Especially useful here is Goldberg's discussion of Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration (WPA) which had the impact of bringing together formerly disparate and diverse kinds of wage earners, all suffering from unemployment and gaining in common a new status and identity as relief recipients. The creation of a group with a shared relationship to the new state institution laid the basis for the creation of the Workers' Alliance of America (WAA), a major vehicle for the development of interracial solidarity in the 1930s. The Workers' Alliance, and more broadly the movement of the unemployed carried on by

¹⁴⁵ ILA 815 Records, Folder 5, Box 12, Wisconsin & Michigan Steamship Company agreements, various years; Folder 7, Box 13, GLTC agreements, various years; Folder 8, Box 13, Hansen agreements, various years; Folder 19, Box 13, DuPuy and Nugent agreements, various years.

Socialists, Communists, and 'Musteites', brought together unemployed workers from an enormous variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds and skill levels and was a major organization for the growth of working class radicalism and the politics of class struggle that exploded in the 1930s.¹⁴⁶ Jones also emphasizes the impact of New Deal policies as factors that tended to spark interracial collaboration. According to his account, the effects of the National Recovery Administration (NRA), created by the National Industrial Relations Act (NIRA), included the lowering of barriers to interracial collaboration among many workers. Jones does not specify a mechanism tying the NRA to interracial solidarity, but there are a couple plausible explanations. First, the NRA had the impact of equalizing split labor markets by establishing minimum wage and maximum hour standards for industries. Second, the NRA gave workers a set of legitimate rules, broadly beneficial to the entire workforce irrespective of race, that they could enforce on their employers, provided they were prepared to engage in collective action. In other words, the formally race neutral coverage of the NRA standards brought workers together across a racial divide into a common institutional constituency and provided an incentive for interracial cooperation in the enforcement of these standards. According to Jones, "participation in debates over wage standards proved to be a politicizing experience" that allowed workers to articulate shared economic interests across racial lines.¹⁴⁷ More generally, New Deal policies — and the formation of new constituencies around these policies — may have had the impact of reducing the priority of intraracial solidarity among many white workers. Anecdotally, Jones again suggests the impact of the state's capacity to mobilize voters based on a broad class interest that cut across racial lines when he tells the story of white workers in Alabama and Florida rejecting white supremacist candidates in favor of New Dealers in congressional primaries.

¹⁴⁶ Goldberg, 91;99; on black workers in particular, 103-04; 106-07.

¹⁴⁷ Jones, 110.

There is interesting suggestive evidence on this score for the case. As will be covered in more detail later, Aaron Toliver was a senior steward in the Workers' Alliance in the late Thirties, at the same time as he was still serving in an official capacity for the ILA. Meanwhile, the census data and internal union minutes show that a significant proportion of the membership found work on WPA projects while they were laid off. There were a number of men that Toliver led twice over, as it were: as an officer in Local 815, and again as an officer in the Workers' Alliance. More generally, the social crisis presented by the Great Depression had opened prospects for class solidarity that would have seemed highly unlikely in earlier years – racially integrated demonstrations for unemployed relief took place across the South, for instance.¹⁴⁸ Milwaukee had seen explosive demonstrations for unemployed relief in 1930 and persistent popular agitation for the subsequent years; of course, the class position of the black and white unemployed was "homogeneous" enough, and they had to level their demands at the same institutions. It is at least plausible that such experiences could warm up white longshoremen – more vulnerable to unemployment than most of their racial counterparts – to interracial collaboration on a class basis.

It should be remembered that these forms of homogenization not only represent effects of class processes on class, but also on race. At the most fundamental level, the transformation of an oppressed black rural peasantry into an urban industrial proletariat raised the potential of the erosion of racial barriers by vastly narrowing the difference in structural class position between white and black laboring groups. For white anti-racist activists, the question of racial equality took on much more concrete dimensions. Rather than simply a matter of denouncing Jim Crow, calling for the anti-lynching bill, and otherwise showing sympathy with the struggle of the folks "down there," it was now a matter of what

¹⁴⁸ See, e.g., Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1990), 14-18.

they would do in their own workplace about, for instance, a bigoted foreman with whom they got along fine before there was any "race question" in the plant. What was once perhaps merely a matter of opinion and personal principles was now a question of deciding whether they would show themselves to their peers as a fellow worker or as a fellow white man – in a context where managers and owners were white men. Black workers, for their part, were confronted with a set of immediate class interests that the prescriptions of black community leaders – often rooted in Washingtonian philosophies of self-help, black capitalism, and racial solidarity – could not satisfy. Against the wisdom of their civic leaders, these workers entered the predominantly white labor movement, joining existing locals or building new ones, with clear eyes about its character. While they did not spurn the notion of intra-racial solidarity as such, they initiated the formation of organizations that demonstrated in practical terms the possibility of interracial projects that, for many, diminished the allure of both separatist and incrementalist appeals.

4. Conclusion – The Racial Capitalism (RC) framework

Is there any way to synthesize these approaches into some coherent theoretical apparatus for understanding the relationship between race and capitalist class relations? There is presently considerable academic interest in the racial capitalism framework, which rather than representing a unified theory, is a diverse set of attempts to identify and elaborate race-class interconnections in various historical contexts, and in particular to "explore and disclose the ways 'racial hierarchies can be functional for capitalist social orders' and vice versa".¹⁴⁹

Go's recent review aptly summarizes some of the most important internal tensions in the racial capitalism literature. Here, I am especially interested in two of the problems he identifies: first, the

¹⁴⁹ Julian Go, "Three Tensions in the Theory of Racial Capitalism," *Sociological Theory* 39, no. 1 (2021): 39.

relationship of the abstract logic of capital to racialization in capitalist societies; second, the question of the functional relationship of race to capitalism.¹⁵⁰

To take the question of functionalism first: theorists in the RC tradition differ among themselves, and sometimes are individually unclear, on the matter of whether racism is a necessary or contingent feature of capitalist society. Robinson's basic thesis that racism was a feature of precapitalist European civilization, and that capitalism emerged historically as a racialized system on account of its European extraction, suggests somewhat ironically that racism's relationship to capitalism is incidental.¹⁵¹ The implication is that, had capitalism emerged out of some other civilization, it would not have come into the world stamped by the racist ideologies and practices of its initiators. Really-existing capitalism cannot be understood apart from racism, but the nature of the attachment is historical and empirical rather than logical.

Most others writing in the RC tradition seem to uphold a more strictly functionalist claim (irrespective of whether they tend to recognize it as such): racism is explained by the fact that it serves to *optimize* the stabilization of capitalist class relations by fomenting divisions among the exploited.¹⁵² The functionalist claim must meet two challenges. First, as Go points out, RC theorists must have some explanation for why race, rather than some other axis of differentiation – ethnicity, language, gender, sexuality, et cetera – should have the distinction of being a functional requirement for capitalism. I believe that it is possible to defend the distinctive position of race as an especially effective form of

¹⁵⁰ Go, 39.

¹⁵¹ Robinson, 26-28. In fact, as Go points out, Robinson is inconsistent on the point; much hinges on what exactly one means by "race" and what counts as a "racial" relation. The overall thrust of the book seems to be the claim that capitalism developed racially on account of the depth of precapitalist racist ideological traditions in European civilization, but in other places he describes these precapitalist practices as ethnic, linguistic, et cetera, only becoming racialized *after* and *because of* the emergence of properly capitalist relations.

¹⁵² The language of optimization is adopted here rather than the stronger claim sometimes made that capitalism absolutely requires race. The functionalist argument does not need to posit that capitalism would not exist at all without racism, only that capitalist systems are more successful with racism than without it.

differentiation compared to other forms. Race has all of the following features: it is presumed by agents to be biological, immutable, and heritable, or in other words no amount of cultural assimilation can change it and it defines groups on a permanent intergenerational basis; it is easily identified based on unchangeable phenotypic markers, which usually cannot be concealed from others; and finally, the sexual mores of racism mean it is not merely a division between individuals, but between entire families and kinship networks. Gender may be presumed to be biological, immutable, and marked by unconcealable physical features, but families unite people across gender lines. Forms of differentiation besides race can and have been used to divide workers, but race seems almost tailor-made for the purpose.¹⁵³ The fact that race and racial systems are highly adaptable to changing social and political conditions in the long term while *seeming* permanent from the perspective of those within its ideological grips is another testament to its utility.

There is a second challenge that the functionalist RC account faces, which is the challenge of functionalist explanation in general: some causal selection mechanism must be specified. It is not enough, for instance, to prove that racism actually does stabilize capitalism or enhance profits. That racism is useful to capitalism is no guarantee that it will emerge or persist. Some causal link between racism's effects and its own reproduction must be established before we can say that racism exists *because* it is functional for capitalism.¹⁵⁴

More will be said about this in the concluding chapter; for now, this brings us to the question of the relationship between the logic of capital to racism in capitalist society. Can there be any relationship between the abstract wage labor relation described in section 2.1. above, on the one hand, and the

¹⁵³ Indeed, it might have been – and if so, this could be a problem for a functionalist account. This theme is taken up in the conclusion.

¹⁵⁴ The distinction being made here is one between functional *description* and functional *explanation* (Cohen 1978). The problem is that analysts often establish a plausible functional description and think that it is sufficient to explain the phenomenon.

concrete empirical thicket of racial dynamics, with all its complex determinations, on the other? Those writing in the RC tradition who are more skeptical of Marxism tend to think that this is a bridge to nowhere: at best, Marx's theory of capital is pitched at too high a level of abstraction to account for real historical processes of racialization, and a different starting point is required; at worst, Marx's theory of capital reflects a set of Eurocentric assumptions about the machinations of capitalism, even in the abstract.¹⁵⁵

Certainly, there can be no straight line drawn from the wage relation to *specific* racial outcomes. And any claim that the wage relation is an *originator* of racial dynamics would find little support in the historical evidence, which shows the emergence of race in contexts of colonial domination, expropriation, and slavery rather than the wage labor of juridically free persons. But it is the question of *reproduction*, not origins, that is the fundamental one for functional explanation, and it is possible at least to *relate* the logic of the wage relation to the reproduction of racial inequality, even if it is not possible to theorize an abstract logic of *racial* capital. To restate the central claim raised in Chapter 1, the idea is this: basic features of capitalist class relations contribute to the reproduction of the racial *status quo*. And the mechanisms are this simple: First, where racial difference is already an entrenched social fact across a wide array of institutions – the state, the education system, the workplace, neighborhoods, families – then sustained militant collective action is necessary to dislodge it as a social organizing principle. Second, for reasons described in section 2 of this chapter, the class situation of

¹⁵⁵ The use of the phrase "theory of capital" rather than "theory of capitalism" here is deliberate and follows Go's distinction. Defenders of Marx's theory of *capitalism*, which is to say a theory of the really-existing process of capitalist development, have convincingly made the case that he was keenly aware of the centrality of colonialism and racism, and did not posit the European proletariat as the only possible agent of history or revolutionary vanguard (see, e.g., Anderson 2010). The RC theorists' criticisms as applied to the theory of *capital*, however, do hit their mark: Marx's analysis of the abstract inner logic of capitalist relations do not account for forms of differentiation of any kind, indeed reducing individuals to nothing other than bearers of abstract production relations and assuming all labor-powers to be units of a homogeneous mass differing only in quantitative terms.

workers makes it inherently difficult for their organizations to sustain a militant posture or a program of permanent mobilization. Third, finally, when workers do succeed in building a militant anti-racist organization, the anarchic terrain of capitalist development may simply pull it out from under them anyway – because employers are actively seeking to destroy the organization, because new technological methods or the geographical movement of capital chasing cheaper labor have displaced them, because the whole industry is going under – or all manner of other causes having their basis in routine capitalist competition.

Chapter 3: Historical Background - The Labor Movement in General, Waterfront Unionism, and Milwaukee Politics

In this chapter I aim to provide some of the essential historical context to the case. I begin in Section 1 at the broadest level, with a brief overview of the essential dynamics of race, class, and unionism in US history. Section 2 summarizes the history of longshoremen's unionism especially as it pertains to race, broken down by region and organization, as there were considerable regional variations in racial dynamics. Section 3 homes in on the political ecosystem of Milwaukee to establish the organizational and ideological scene in which the men of 815 acted.

1. Race, class, and labor through the early postwar era

In this section I briefly summarize the broad sweep of the historical relationship of race to class formation in the United States. The relationship can be characterized as being comprised of four periods: First, the American racial formation, along with the basic definitions of racial categories still in use today, emerged in the context of the consolidation of the slave plantation economy in a constitutional republic that defined itself in radical enlightenment terms. The ideology of race functioned to resolve the contradiction of keeping slaves in a nation recognizing that “all men are created equal”.¹⁵⁶ Put simply, only blacks were slaves, and to be black was to be in danger of enslavement; only whites were slave owners, and to be white was to be certain of one’s freedom from slavery. This particular articulation of race to class position and political citizenship produced a stark,

¹⁵⁶ Fields, “Slavery, Race and Ideology”.

virtually binary white/black racial formation that distinguished Anglo-North American racism from its counterparts in the former Spanish and Portuguese colonies in the New World.¹⁵⁷

Second, with the abolition of slavery after 1865, and after a brief and extraordinary period of experimentation and conflict during Reconstruction (1865-77), black workers were coerced back into the plantation economy as sharecroppers and convict laborers. While there were a substantial number of white sharecroppers, the vast majority of blacks were relegated to this quasi-serfdom and held there by the emerging Jim Crow apartheid law, with the backing of the lynch mob. The *de jure* Jim Crow system would survive until it was dismantled by the legal victories of the Civil Rights Movement, in particular the Supreme Court's 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* which overturned the "separate but equal" doctrine established by *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), and the passage of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1968 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. This period also saw the massive expansion of a white proletariat in the United States, fed largely by the crises of the *ancien régime* in southern and eastern Europe which drove millions of laborers, largely peasants, to emigrate. Rapid industrial growth meant an acute demand for labor, which was met through the mechanism of an essentially open border for these migrants; this strategy ensured that black sharecroppers would mainly remain closed out of work in large-scale industry, and that the nation's supply of oppressed agricultural labor would not be significantly disrupted, for the time being.

Third, the social forces that would start to crack Jim Crow were set in motion with the massive migrations of black people from the rural South to the urban North and West. The Great Migration was driven by the desire to escape the racist violence and oppression central to the political economy of the

¹⁵⁷ The "one-drop" rule of hypodescent – whereby anyone was defined as black who has *any* known African ancestry – is a dramatic illustration of the binary character of the US racial formation. While this rule has undergone considerable disintegration in the post-Civil Rights era, it persists to this day as a kind of habit whereby the children of white/black intermarriages are still usually designated black.

South, the economic crises of the Southern agricultural economy, and, crucially, the explosive growth in labor demand in the manufacturing centers of the North that came with each of the World Wars and the immediate post-World War II growth. World War I-era reductions in immigration were made permanent by new legal restrictions primarily targeting Southern and Eastern Europeans, motivated by nativist movements. This created a foothold (or expanded an existing one) for black workers in important industries such as steel, auto, meatpacking, and shipping, and in the labor unions organizing these industries. The significance of the Great Migration in terms of the changing racial character of the American political economy is primarily that it represented the transformation of the black labor force from a rural peasantry to an urban proletariat and created new strategic blocs of black voters outside the South whose support could provide the margin of victory for office-seekers in the North.¹⁵⁸

Finally, the advance of globalization and automation in the core industries employing black manufacturing workers led to catastrophic job losses for both black and white workers. White workers, however, were more likely than their black counterparts to be reemployed in the service sector (albeit at generally lower compensation) or in the manufacturing facilities that were increasingly moving out of urban centers to suburban or exurban peripheries, where ongoing labor market discrimination and patterns of housing segregation blocked black reemployment in either sector. By the 1960s, deindustrialization had already contributed heavily to the devastation of black urban communities and transformed much of the black industrial proletariat into what some scholars have characterized as an underclass, or a surplus population from the standpoint of American capitalism.¹⁵⁹ Much of this black

¹⁵⁸ Douglas McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970* (Chicago: UC Press, 1982).

¹⁵⁹ Sidney Peck, "The Economic Situation of Negro Labor," in *The Negro and the American Labor Movement*, ed. Julius Jacobson (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1968), 214-15; William Julius Wilson, *The Declining Significance of Race*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: UC Press, 1980), 1-2, 126-134.

industrial proletariat was essentially in its infancy, barely a generation old, when its economic basis was destroyed.

The third period outlined above took place roughly from 1910-1970. It is in this period that emerged, for the first time since Reconstruction, the possibility of a radical reconfiguration of the American racial formation, partially realized in the victories of the Civil Rights Movement. The temporal parameters of this study also fall within this period. A closer view, taking account of the racial practices of labor organizations and their relationship to black workers and black organizations, is warranted to better set up the case investigated in this study.

Even casual students of the American labor movement will be broadly familiar with the racist practices of AFL unions. While the AFL constitution technically prohibited racial restrictions on membership, affiliated unions easily found ways around this requirement. The policy of non-discrimination was decisively abandoned with the AFL's admission of the International Association of Machinists in 1895, which required members to make a binding pledge to propose only white men for the membership ritual; similar methods of exclusion were adopted by the Boilermakers and Iron Ship Builders. By 1909, the AFL demonstrated that even these workarounds were no longer necessary when they admitted the Brotherhood of Railway Steamship Clerks and Freight Handlers, and the Brotherhood of Railway Carmen, whose constitutions contained explicit language barring black workers from membership.¹⁶⁰

black members of the AFL (frequently belonging to segregated locals), most famously A. Philip Randolph of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, waged an internal struggle to have these and other organizations sanctioned for their discrimination. As delegates to AFL conventions, they frequently

¹⁶⁰ The 1920 convention of the AFL recommended that the Brotherhood of Railway Carmen remove its "whites only" clause, but the Executive Council of the Federation ignored it (Spero and Harris, 91).

attempted to force consideration of the race question, but the executive leadership and the heads of many of the affiliates studiously avoided the matter time and again.¹⁶¹ But their marginality within the federation, the concern among the leadership that a principled position on racial discrimination would drive away white supremacist members, and the Federation's insistence on "trade autonomy" meant that Jim Crow unionism remained the order of the day. The AFL's policy of toleration and accommodation to racism even continued after the war: in 1946, the convention rejected a resolution (again) calling for the dissolution of Jim Crow auxiliary locals, in which black members were admitted but given no voting power, delegate strength, or independence from white lodges whatsoever; in 1949, the convention passed a resolution supporting Federal Fair Employment Practices legislation only after it was amended to omit the words "and labor unions" from the statement calling for the "elimination of discrimination in industry and labor unions based upon race, color, religion, national origin, or ancestry".¹⁶²

Owing to these practices of exclusion, when black workers did successfully find employment in vocations previously off limits to them, it was frequently as strikebreakers. Much of the black political and intellectual leadership of the time openly criticized the blatant racism of the union movement and called on black workers to break strikes and otherwise deliberately undercut all-white unions.¹⁶³ Black workers early in the 20th century found a more accepting milieu in the Industrial Workers of the World,

¹⁶¹ For a detailed account of these avoidances and dodges by the AFL leadership, see, e.g., Marc Karson and Ronald Radosh, "The AFL and the Negro Worker, 1894-1949," in *The Negro and the American Labor Movement*, ed. Jacobson, 155-187. See also Spero and Harris, 87-115.

¹⁶² Carson and Radosh, 187.

¹⁶³ There are interesting exceptions. Tangentially relevant to this study, a broad cross-section of black leaders in Milwaukee at one point called on black workers to refuse to be recruited as strikebreakers in a labor dispute on the Northwestern Railroad in 1922. The call was written by members of the United Negro Improvement Association, Marcus Garvey's organization, and supported by the local NAACP, the Milwaukee Urban League, and the City Federation of Colored Women's Clubs. The *Wisconsin Weekly Blade*, the publication of the Grand United Order of the Odd Fellows representing the black bourgeois and professional classes, adopted the same position in a departure from its more typical pro-strikebreaking position (Trotter, 57).

but while this union led a number of heroic struggles, it never broke out of the margins of the labor movement.¹⁶⁴

The major turning point for black workers' relationship to the labor movement came with the founding and explosive growth of the CIO. Founded within the AFL as the Committee for Industrial Organization in 1935, the committee's purpose was to instantiate a shift to the philosophy and practice of industrial organization, as opposed to the traditional craft organization of the AFL. The AFL's membership and strength had suffered decline through the 1920s, and commitment to craft-based organization left the federation unable to meet the challenge of organizing a growing "low-skill" industrial workforce who were increasingly coming to replace traditional craft labor. Support for the establishment of industry-based organizations – whereby workers within an industry belong to the same union irrespective of their craft – had been brewing in the AFL for decades. But by the mid-30s the federation's internal crisis came to a head when John L. Lewis – the popular albeit autocratic leader of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) – spearheaded the foundation of the CIO with funding provided by his own UMWA, with support also coming from other leading lights such as David Dubinsky of the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU), Sidney Hillman of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA), and others. Altogether, eight international unions collaborated to form the CIO, and were considered by the leadership of the AFL as an enemy within.

The debate over craft versus industrial organization had been taking place within the AFL for decades by the time Lewis and collaborators announced the formation of the CIO. As early as 1902,

¹⁶⁴ The IWW's willingness to lead strikes but refusal to sign contracts meant that the organization might recruit thousands of new members in the midst of a strike who, once the strike was concluded and there was no contract to enforce, would then rapidly drift away from membership. A notable exception to this pattern was the IWW Local 8 in Philadelphia, representing longshoremen. Local 8 might be the best example of a robust, militant interracial union in the World War I era. The union was led by Ben Fletcher, a black longshoreman and one of the country's most prominent radicals at the time (Cole, 1-7).

industrial unionism was raised and debated on the floor of AFL conventions; the formation in 1905 of the Industrial Workers of the World, a radical union strongly committed to industrial organization, was precipitated in part by the repeated, decisive failures of AFL delegates to win a space for industrial unionism within the AFL.¹⁶⁵ For skilled workers, organizing on the basis of craft allowed them to effectively control the labor supply of workers in their own trade, and also provided them with a strong sense of pride and dignity.¹⁶⁶ The craft form of organization, however, made less sense for unskilled workers who were more easily replaced. As the onslaught of mechanization and scientific management led to deskilling and the proliferation of proportionately greater numbers of unskilled or semiskilled workers in industry, industrial unionists argued that an overly zealous commitment to craft organization would render the AFL irrelevant. Without possession of in-demand and scarce skills, industrial workers could not hope to raise barriers to entry in their trade as a way to protect wages or conditions. Instead, industrial workers needed a form of organization that encompassed workers throughout an industry irrespective of skill or trade in order to leverage workers' capacity to shut down an entire firm. Perhaps the key distinctions between the two organizing principles were these: First, craft unionism would entail many different union locals within a given firm or industry, with distinct contracts for each trade; industrial unionism would entail a single local covering all workers within a firm regardless of their trade, with a single contract that all bargained for at once. Second, craft unions had an interest in restricting to the extent possible their membership and thereby the size of the labor force engaged in their own

¹⁶⁵ Socialists within the AFL in the early 20th century frequently raised and supported proposals for industrial unionism. The predominance of Socialists within the Wisconsin labor movement made the Wisconsin State Federation of Labor an early source of institutional support – ultimately unsuccessful, of course – for industrial organization in the AFL. See, e.g., Beck (1982), Gavett (1965), and Muzik (1960).

¹⁶⁶ This pride of craft was crucial to the producerist ideology of the early stages of the American labor movement, and was also tied up with workers' sense of masculinity. For an excellent description of craft workers' orientation to their work and resistance to deskilling, see David Montgomery, *Workers' Control In America* (Cambridge: CUP, 1979), 9-31; 113-138.

trade, and pursued their interests through their capacity to control labor supply; industrial unions had an interest in widening their membership as broadly as possible, and pursued their interests through their capacity to withhold as many of the various sorts of labor involved in a production process as possible.

Without minimizing the real philosophical differences between John Lewis and his collaborators in the CIO and the AFL mainstream, it is necessary to recognize that industrial unionism really represented a better, more realistic strategy for the survival of the organizations they led; pragmatic concerns were at least as important as philosophical ones. Whatever the motivations were, however, a shift toward industrial unionism entailed a stronger commitment to class-wide solidarity that deemphasized occupational and skill differences among workers. In many contexts, for an industrial strategy to be successful, it also meant that the CIO would have to overcome other distinctions between workers that tended to correspond to occupational and skill differences, including gender, ethnicity, and race. The craft-based AFL locals might maintain race-based criteria for membership, but industrial unions could often not afford to adopt such rules. It would certainly be an unjustified exaggeration to say that the CIO represented a panacea for black workers; nevertheless, the CIO's commitment to industrial unionism opened the door to the mass organization of largely unskilled black industrial workers into racially integrated labor organizations. Hundreds of thousands of black workers were thus brought into the organized labor movement, and many became important rank-and-file activists, stewards, committeemen, or officers at various levels in their organizations.

The geographic and organizational patterns of black workers' organization was highly uneven within the labor movement and across industrial sectors, and the orientation of CIO unions to civil rights and the representation of minority groups – within workplaces, the broader polity, and the union organizations themselves – was likewise mixed. In some of the industries the CIO organized such as iron,

steel, and coal, blacks had long been a large part of the labor force, and the corresponding unions (e.g., United Mine Workers, United Steelworkers) wisely adopted at least non-racist recruitment policies to ensure their organizational success. Where black workers historically were excluded from jobs, however, as in the textiles industry (represented by the Textile Workers Union), the CIO typically adopted these patterns as well, making few serious efforts to bring down color bars in these workplaces. Some segregated locals – although many fewer than in the AFL, where it was essentially the default pattern – existed in various CIO organizations, such as the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, Oil Chemical and Atomic Workers, United Rubber Workers, and others. Other CIO unions, on the other hand, became famous for their militant commitment to racial equality. The United Packinghouse Workers of America stood out even among the more racially liberal unions for the risks it was willing to accept to its organization in the name of racial equality; where UMW and USWA adopted anti-racist policies in the interests of self-preservation, at least in part, the UPWA clashed with CIO leadership and ignited rank-and-file disaffiliation movements by the strength of its anti-racist commitments. The National Maritime Union outlawed discrimination in its ranks in Article One of its constitution, having been born from integrated sit-down strikes and open opposition to the International Seaman's Union policy of segregated locals.¹⁶⁷ The leadership of the United Electrical Workers – and, after its expulsion from the CIO, its competitor the International United Electrical Workers – expressed strong support for civil rights, but as few black workers were employed in the electronics industries or organized into either the UE or IUE, that support did not rise far past the level of rhetoric as far as the union's internal policies were concerned.¹⁶⁸ The United Auto Workers – among the most important CIO unions owing to the centrality of the auto industry to the American economy, and with a sizeable black membership – was

¹⁶⁷ Critchlow, 237-38.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 235.

slow at first to move decisively on civil rights questions, as contending leadership factions feared losing the support of racist locals. But when Walter Reuther became the undisputed leader of the organization, and with the geographic center of gravity of the UAW being located well outside Dixie, he could easily and without much risk adopt a more resolute stance on civil rights.¹⁶⁹

In short, the CIO represented an advance for the black freedom struggle, albeit one highly limited by the uneven geographical and organizational distribution of black workers, widely varying levels of commitment to civil rights among CIO international and local leaders, and the tendency in some important internationals to tolerate or accommodate racism for reasons of expediency. Still, the massive influx of black workers into industry in the war years, along with the CIO's relative success in winning them over as members, suggests that the AFL might have opted to update its own racial practices in order to better compete with its new rival. Yet, while some AFL affiliates and locals did shift to more open racial policies, the dead hand of the past weighed heavily on the Federation. Several of the most important unions within the AFL – for example, the Boilermakers, who were central to the wartime shipbuilding industry – clung to racial exclusion, and either opened their ranks only after coming under pressure from President Roosevelt's Fair Employment Practices Commission, or even managed to outlast the FEPC and maintain discriminatory policies by the time the committee was dissolved in 1946.¹⁷⁰ Thus, by the end of the war, the oldest and most prestigious organization of American labor

¹⁶⁹ Sumner M. Rosen, "The CIO Era, 1935-1955," in Jacobson, ed., 204-05.

¹⁷⁰ Andrew Kersten (2006) compares the racial practices of two Boilermakers locals, one in Portland, OR and the other in Providence, RI. The Portland local typified the AFL craft unions; its racial "liberalization" came in the form of making a shift in policy from the categorical exclusion of black workers altogether, to forming utterly powerless black auxiliaries that gave the white section of the local total control over the black section. The Portland local absolutely resisted any real integration. The Providence local, on the other hand, represents an interesting exception to the trend in racial policy in the Boilermakers; Milwaukee's ILA 815 represents an interesting case for similar reasons.

held the dubious distinction of maintaining and publicly defending Jim Crow practices longer than the federal government and even many of the employers.

After the war, the labor movement and whatever commitments it had to interracial solidarity began to wither under the heat of a renewed offensive against the labor movement and anticommunist witch-hunting (the latter often serving as a pretense in service of the former). While anticommunism and antiradicalism had long been an identifiable political tendency within the American labor movement, the project of rooting out communists, radicals, and sympathizers came to a head in the early postwar years; meanwhile, the project of civil rights unionism took a backseat. In 1946, the CIO undertook to organize the South in a major campaign called Operation Dixie; the effort was led by conservative stalwarts, focused almost entirely on the all-white textiles industry, and studiously avoided any direct confrontation with the Jim Crow system – arguably *the* central labor question in the South. Operation Dixie was a failure by all accounts, and the CIO retreated to their Northern and Western citadels, leaving the South as a low-wage, non-union haven for capital.¹⁷¹ In 1949, the CIO demonstrated its reliability as a partner in the defense of the nation from the Communist menace when it summarily expelled eleven international affiliates on grounds that they were Communist-dominated, and even established and funded new internationals to raid these eleven now-isolated organizations. By the time of the AFL-CIO merger in 1955, neither organization was seriously prioritizing civil rights.¹⁷² Within a decade after that, waves of deindustrialization – accelerated by the labor movement's defeat in the South and the unions' cession of control over production to capital – would begin to wipe out huge layers of the organized black industrial proletariat.

¹⁷¹ To my knowledge the only book-length general history of Operation Dixie is Barbara S. Griffith, *The Crisis of American Labor: Operation Dixie and the Defeat of the CIO* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988).

¹⁷² Rosen, 207-08.

2. Waterfront unionism, ideology, and race

The history of waterfront workers in the United States paints a picture of extraordinary complexity in their patterns of consciousness and organizational cultures, and generalization is difficult. Out of a waterfront workforce that produced leaders as different as Joe Ryan and Harry Bridges, worker-intellectuals as ideologically distant as Eric Hoffer and Stan Weir, and who by the mid-twentieth century had been represented by organizations as mutually unlike as the ILA, the ILWU, and the IWW – what coherence can be found?

Certain broad characteristics define waterfront work everywhere: chiefly, the often casual and irregular nature of employment, and the arduousness and danger of the work. Few elements are more infamous than the shape-up hiring system, whereby large groups of men would gather in a circle or half-circle around the hiring foreman, who would pick out from the crowd the gangs who would work the ship that day. Typically, there would be twice as many men at the shape-up than those needed for the job. Those selected were guaranteed work only on the one ship and worked until the job was finished – anywhere from a few hours to thirty or forty consecutive hours, or more.¹⁷³ When they needed work again, they started over, appearing at the shape-up and hoping. The shape-up concentrated power in the hands of employers and maximized competition among workers: any foot-dragging or troublemaking today meant that someone else could take your place tomorrow. The system was prone to abuse, and it became typical at many ports for workers to have to kickback a portion of their wages to the hiring boss in order to secure work. To sum up, the shape-up was an abysmal scene of human suffering, ranging from the mundane desperation of any casualized workforce to vicious debasement at

¹⁷³ Kimeldorf (1998) notes a testimony by Jack Walsh of MTW Local 8 in Philadelphia in which he describes a gang forced to work 110 consecutive hours (100). Two of the men died of exhaustion.

the hands of the hiring bosses. On an ordinary morning at the docks, one might see the gloom written on the faces of the men who had been turned away; and a reflective observer might be yet more depressed by the looks of relief – or darker yet, elation – on the men chosen for the privilege of being worked to the bone. Sometimes the scenes could inspire utter despair: In his memoir, playwright Arthur Miller provides a dramatic description of the sort of treatment hiring bosses might give to the workers whose fates they held in their hands:

I stood around with longshoreman huddling in doorways in rain and snow on Columbia Street facing the piers, waiting for the hiring boss, on whose arrival they surged forward and formed up in a semicircle to attract his pointing finger and the numbered brass checks that guaranteed a job for the day. After distributing the checks to his favorites, who had quietly paid him off, the boss often found a couple left over and in his generosity tossed them into the air over the little crowd. In a frantic scramble, the men would tear at each other's hands, sometimes getting into bad fights. Their cattle-like acceptance of this humiliating process struck me as an outrage, even more sinister than the procedure itself. It was though they had lost the mere awareness of hope.¹⁷⁴

Longshoremen compensated for these and other indignities in part by constructing a culture of hypermasculinity on the job.¹⁷⁵ The dangers and difficulties of the work were transmogrified into sources of pride. For all its detestable faults, the casual nature of employment meant that a man decided when he wanted to work and had some control over which jobs he took, and his life was not so bound to the clock's discipline as a regular employee at a factory or shop. While the cultivation of a

¹⁷⁴ Arthur Miller, *Timebends: A Life* (London: Methuen, 1987), 147.

¹⁷⁵ Nelson, 9.

masculinist identity was not, by any means, unique to the waterfront – it was an essential element of the ideology of skilled craftsmen in their opposition to the encroachment of management prerogative over their work, for instance – it was perhaps especially conspicuous among waterfront workers.¹⁷⁶

Yet the necessarily cooperative nature of the work drove the formation of deep bonds of trust and mutuality among men. Longshoremen often formed lasting informal partnerships with each other, seeking work at the shape-up not as individuals but as pairs – even regular gangs sometimes emerged out of the casual shape. Stan Weir described the informal work group or partnership as a "total institution," with the men spending up to twelve hours per day together – going to the hall, waiting for the job, working, eating lunch and having coffee, working again, and signing up for the next day's work. "Longshore partnerships," said Weir, are in a way respected by the longshoremen at least as much as marriage partnerships. Laugh, argue, 'bruise and heal quick.' Personality flaws are overlooked in order to retain the mergers because 'there's no one any better than him when it comes to work'".¹⁷⁷

But arguably the most decisive feature of waterfront workers' shared history up to the Depression Era is a legacy of defeat. Among the oldest categories of workers in the United States, evidence of collective job actions by longshoremen begin to appear in the early nineteenth century, along with primitive attempts at collective bargaining. The first major strike of longshoremen recorded in the American press took place in 1836, beginning in New York and spreading to Philadelphia; nothing whatsoever was gained, except – if oral traditions are accurate – a handful of mysterious deaths and disappearances of strike leaders. Most future attempts, while often heroic, fared little better, each time cracking apart under the weight of employer and police repression, the economic desperation of the waterfront labor force, and the at times savage and humiliating competition for jobs on the docks. By

¹⁷⁶ Montgomery, *Workers' Control*, 12-15.

¹⁷⁷ Stan Weir, *Singlejack Solidarity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 92.

the time the twentieth century arrived, the longshoremen's "every attempt – and there were hundreds – to organize the chaotic waterfront...collapsed in unmitigated disaster" for nearly a hundred years; they were "unique for sheer effort and total defeat".¹⁷⁸

Waterfront unionism was thus forged in the crucible of a century of debacles. Perhaps in this light the historical antinomies of longshoremen's organization – conservatism and insularity on the one hand, radicalism and expansive class-consciousness on the other – are more sensible. In some respects, it is the tendency toward radicalism that seems more obvious and the conservatism that presents a puzzle. The work was highly exploitative and dangerous, while its casual nature contributed both to a sense of indignation and an ethos of personal autonomy; the nature of the labor process itself generated strong feelings of camaraderie with workmates; and the social environment of the waterfront facilitated the creation of cosmopolitan social networks with seamen who brought with them new information and ideas from every corner of the world. One might assume that a spirit of internationalism and class-wide solidarity would easily sprout up from the seeds of radical doctrines, sewn by a seafaring proletariat in the fertile soil of the longshoremen's experience of harsh exploitation offending their manly independence. But over the course of a hundred years, the ordeal of defeat – watching hungry men fight to hold a picket while hungrier men cross it, absorbing the countless blows of police clubs and bullets, friends and kin disappearing or turning up dead, the hanging threat of the ruin wrought by the blacklist, and often all of it for naught – laid a thick and toxic sediment of history in which not every seed could take hold, and through which fewer shoots could break.¹⁷⁹ The waterfront

¹⁷⁸ Russell, 11.

¹⁷⁹ The notion of the importance of the "sedimented historical experience" of workers for class formation comes from Mike Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream: Politics and Economy in the History of the U.S. Working Class* (London: Verso, 1986), 7.

thus could become host to the basest sort of cutthroat competition between workers, punctuated with inspiring demonstrations of undaunted solidarity, and everything in between.

Early longshoremen's unionism was therefore not mainly characterized by political or tactical radicalism. Quite the contrary: the lessons of the past urged caution, cultivated a tradition of mistrust of allied trades and even of other longshoremen, and an official commitment to antiradicalism.

Longshoremen were early proponents of immigration restrictions, many themselves being migrants or the sons of migrants and sensing that future arrivals spelled increased competition. They were not wont to join up with the efforts of other workers, in this respect adopting a highly job-conscious rather than class conscious orientation. If the nature of the work generated close partnerships among men, this could intensify narrower group solidarities of kinship or ethnicity and sharpen hostility to perceived outsiders. Thus, when the first efforts to build a labor federation were underway under the auspices of the National Labor Union (1866-1873) the locals of the Longshoremen's Union Protective Association in New York stood aside. While the later ILA (est. 1892) in its early years had an acquisitiveness for turf that gave it an inchoate industrial character, that organization did not exhibit broad principles of class solidarity as such, and kept aloof of major regional and national labor campaigns.¹⁸⁰

Still, exceptions to this general picture are important enough that waterfront unionism in the United States evades easy generalization (except as complex and contradictory). On the Pacific coast and in Philadelphia, for instance, longshoremen joined up with the radical IWW in the first decades of the twentieth century and established very different organizational cultures than those found in the ILA strongholds. The clearest expression of the political contradictions inherent to waterfront unionism was, of course, the Pacific coast of the ILA splitting from that organization to form the ILWU under the aegis

¹⁸⁰ Russell, 18; Larowe, 15-20.

of the CIO. But even this basic east/west split was beset by its own contradictions, with conservative impulses clearly present within the ILWU and radical possibilities occasionally bursting forth within the ILA.

The variation in longshoremen's consciousness and organizational practices are rooted, in part, in the fact that the social relations comprising waterfront work, and therefore the experience of waterfront work, vary greatly from one port to the next, or even one pier to the next as in the New York case. How a port (or pier) is situated in broader trade patterns, the range of commodities handled by a given port and their relative proportions, the level of development of port facilities and technology, the patterns of ownership of capital and the competitive conditions among port employers, the community characteristics of the port workforce, the local history of struggle and workers' remembrance of that struggle: these together affect the extent of inequalities of skill and authority among waterfront workers, the balance of bargaining strength between workers and employers (and, for that matter, states and their institutions), the barriers or opportunities for organization and the patterns such organization will take among workers, the aims of the longshoremen's unions if indeed they succeed in becoming established, and the strategic and tactical orientations they will tend to adopt.

In the subsections below, I aim to summarize in brief compass a demonstrative cross-section of the history of longshoremen's unionism with particular attention to patterns of interracial and interethnic solidarity and conflict in order to better situate the Milwaukee case. I start in section 2.1. with the longshoremen of the New York waterfront. The New York longshoremen loom large in the history and historiography of waterfront unionism as having been the predominating force in the ILA by the second decade of the twentieth century, and the *de facto* archetype for both the popular and scholarly images of longshoremen, their unions, and their social worlds. In section 2.2., I review the Philadelphia longshoremen, who stood almost as a reverse image of their New York counterparts,

organized for a time under the IWW in a radical interracial formation, before eventually joining the ILA and converging to the latter's basic pattern. In 2.3., I cover the South Atlantic and Gulf Coast region, with particular attention to the New Orleans longshoremen and their biracial solidarity. In 2.4., I discuss the Pacific Coast longshoremen, paying special attention to the comparison of race relations in the ports of San Francisco and Los Angeles (San Pedro) after the rise of the ILWU. Finally, in 2.5., I give a brief overview of Great Lakes longshoremen.

It bears mention that, aside from the Pacific Coast and for an extraordinary decade or so in Philadelphia, the history of longshoremen's unionism in the twentieth century is essentially the history of the ILA. Among the reasons for the wide variation in race relations across regions and locals is that the ILA took a "path-of-least-resistance" sort of attitude in their approach to black workers – indeed, as will be elaborated below, the ILWU was also less principled and more crudely pragmatic on the question than it claimed to be. As of 1930, roughly thirty percent of the longshoremen in the nation were black; that meant that, from a practical point of view, protection of the white longshoremen required the organization of their black counterparts.¹⁸¹ In some cases, especially in the North Atlantic, this often meant the inclusion of black workers as subordinate members in integrated locals. In the South Atlantic and Gulf Coast region, it usually meant locals that were segregated outright – an arrangement often preferred by black workers themselves, as it conferred autonomy from white local leadership, guaranteed black delegations to international conventions, and established a basis for the election of black international vice presidents. But the ILA – even while it could point to the fact of its large black membership to shield itself from criticism – made no special efforts to strengthen the position of black workers in the organization, pursue the particular demands of its black members, or impose sanctions

¹⁸¹ Spero and Harris, 182.

on white members' exclusionary practices, except where these were deemed injurious to the "plain and simple" goals of the ILA. As one of the few organizations in the AFL that admitted black members, the ILA showed how racial inequality could be reproduced not only by exclusion, but also by inclusion plus inaction.

2.1. New York¹⁸²

The Port of New York was a universe unto itself, for most of its history the largest port in the nation by any measure, comprising 770 miles of shoreline, some 350 miles of developed frontage, hundreds of employers, and tens of thousands of waterfront workers – roughly 50,000 in 1938, represented by some 50 locals of the ILA.¹⁸³ By that time, the die had long been cast on the basic characteristics of waterfront unionism in New York. Radicalism of either the syndicalist or communist variety was thoroughly consigned to the margins, and the leadership highly conservative and in most cases excessively cozy with employers. The New York ILA leadership defended the use of the demeaning shape-up, which not only provided opportunities for kickbacks to the employers, but also allowed the ILA leaders to puff up their membership numbers and increase dues revenue – in addition to getting cut in on some kickbacks as well.¹⁸⁴

The shape-up would live on in New York until 1953, long past the time other locals had won union hiring halls, when it was finally abolished not by the ILA's hand but by the Waterfront Commission, established by the governments of New York and New Jersey mainly for the purpose of combating the widespread racketeering on the waterfront. The New York ILA developed a cozy

¹⁸² This section is based on material from Nelson (2001) and Kimeldorf (1988) except where otherwise noted. For Philadelphia I have relied on Cole's *Wobblies on the Waterfront*.

¹⁸³ Nelson, 5.

¹⁸⁴ Charles Larrowe, *Shape-up and Hiring Hall: A Comparison of Hiring Methods and Labor Relations on the New York and Seattle Waterfronts* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1955), 9; 77.

relationship with employers in which contracts were settled cordially, typically without the influence or input of the membership. Sometimes contracts were little more than "gentlemen's agreements," never committed to print. Locals did not keep written records of their meetings, which in any case were both rare and not genuine membership meetings, and elections were usually conducted in such a way as to guarantee a predetermined outcome. Challengers to the leadership confronted not only an autocratic leadership, but the forces of organized crime, who had established a foothold in the union's officialdom in order to get a piece of the lucrative loading racket. In short, the ILA in New York was undemocratic, conservative, more or less insensitive to the needs of the membership, and, according to some critics, not even really a union so much as a racketeering outfit with a dues collection agency attached.

The geography and distribution of waterfront work in New York stands out for the extent to which it was structured by ethnicity and race; indeed, it is plausible that the New York waterfront was a major site of the reproduction of ethnic identity in New York and contributed to its longevity there compared to other places in the US. By the 1850s, the Irish had come to be the predominating ethnic group among longshoremen, and by the 1880s as much as 95% of the waterfront workforce that decade being Irish and Irish-American men. Prior to their predominance, black workers, free and slave, had been a mainstay on the waterfront for decades dating back to the colonial era. But as they arrived in droves to New York, they came to displace black and all other longshoremen. "Every hour," wrote Frederick Douglass, who himself had been a maritime worker in Baltimore, "sees the black man elbowed out of employment by some newly arrived emigrant whose hunger and whose color are thought to give him a better title to the place".¹⁸⁵ The Irish supplemented hiring bosses' preferences by way of violence, driving and keeping those who were outside of their own kinship and ethnic neighborhood networks

¹⁸⁵ Quoted in Nelson, 14.

from the docks. They also increasingly came to occupy the neighborhoods closest to the waterfront, as black residents were driven further and further away. The New York waterfront, in short, provided the institutional and social matrix in which the Irish "became white": they avoided the "taint of blackness" that might be associated with working the "slave" jobs of the docks by driving black workers from the waterfront labor market altogether and redefining the work and even the physical space of the docks as white.

The Irishmen's victory in this regard was decisive, but not total. The "resilient rather than continuous" unionism of New York waterfront workers was in part broken up by largely black and Italian strikebreakers in the latter half of the nineteenth century.¹⁸⁶ Thus, over the blows of the Irish, black workers and Italians – who, at least as yet, were taking no great strides to distinguish themselves from black people, and were not "quite" white – got toeholds on the waterfront.¹⁸⁷ Yet the Italians would enjoy greater access to the docks than their black counterparts; by 1914, Italians comprised half the 45,000-strong port workforce and had successfully established ethnic monopolies over much of the work in Brooklyn (and, by the 1920s, they had largely adopted the anti-black prejudices of their new nation). By comparison, census data in 1910 indicated only 1,119 black dockworkers. But the Irish would

¹⁸⁶ Nelson, 16.

¹⁸⁷ Such phrases as "becoming white" and "not quite white" – bestowed on labor history by the "whiteness studies" literature – should, I believe, be seen as shorthand for a more complex idea. Neither the Irish nor the Italians were black, and in that respect, in the American ideological system of race, were already white in the most important sense (Fields 1990, 97-98). No laws provided for the ownership by white men of Irishmen or Italians, or prohibited the marriage of white people with Irish or Italian people. The racial ideology of the time designated distinctions *among* whites, with lower and higher orders, and certainly popular *comparisons* to black people in the press and in everyday language were leveraged to degrade the image of those European groups held to be inferior – but this confirms the centrality of the black/white binary in US racial ideology as much as it indicates the existence of "in-between peoples" or more ambiguous distinctions. In other words, American elites may have seen the Irish as an inferior race in 1830, and the Italians as an inferior race in 1880, but they were inferior *white* races, whose racial inferiority could thus be transformed into mere ethnic difference – to the extent that the principal black/white binary was made primary. The process of "becoming white," understood as a result of the agency of degraded white workers, was primarily their effort in establishing *blackness* – rather than Irishness, for instance – as the *sine qua non* of racial inferiority.

maintain, through networks of kin and neighborhood, their hold on the most desirable piers, the easiest work, and the most regular and stable jobs.

The use of black strikebreakers in major strikes of 1899 and 1907, followed by the labor demands of World War I, substantially reversed previous attempts at the total removal of black men from the port labor market. By the time the ILA came to dwell at the Port of New York, winning its first port-wide agreement in 1916, it generally ratified the presence of black workers, and white ILA members came to tolerate – within certain parameters – their black counterparts as a fact of life on the waterfront. This was no indication of any belief in either social or even industrial equality, however, but a pragmatic adaptation by the ILA to the complex ethnic geography of the port. "We are in the union today," said a leader of New York's black Local 968, "because the white man had to take us in for his own protection. Outside the organization the Negro could scab on the white man. Inside he can't. In return for this we get a share of the work, the protection of the union contract and organization support".¹⁸⁸

In 1921, when E. Franklin Frazier conducted his study of the black longshoremen, only one of the eighty-two men he interviewed did not belong to the ILA; those who did were divided among five locals, two of which were black-only and the remaining three being "mixed," including Local 968. By the Depression Era, 968 would be the only "black local," but itself included a small and dwindling minority of whites. Yet 968 did not include every black ILA member, with two thousand more spread across several other of the port's dozens of locals. The experience of 968 is emblematic of black/white race relations on the New York waterfront. Unlike other New York locals, 968 stood out as an anomaly in that they did not have their own pier on which their own men would have privileged access to work. That meant that

¹⁸⁸ Spero and Harris, 199-200.

black 968 members were forced to try to find work on other piers that white members claimed as their own. Labor conditions during World War II allowed 968 to make agreements with several companies operating piers in Brooklyn and maintain relatively steady work, but after the war six white locals, with the support of ILA leadership, came to claim exclusive control over the piers at which those companies operated, squeezing out the black longshoremen. (For the black men distributed across majority-white locals, the situation was not much better – they were generally relegated to the least desirable jobs, given last access to work, and, of course, had to work in a hostile environment with little hope of winning any representation in the local leadership).

In 1948, at a time when Joe Ryan's hold on the ILA was beginning to slip in the face of major reform efforts among New York locals, Local 968 led an effort to win fairer treatment by the union, organizing a sit-in at Ryan's office with the support of the Harlem Trade Union Council. In fact, Ryan had encouraged 968 to take public action, telling 968 President Cleophas Jacobs to "go out and create a crisis" so that Ryan and the ILA leadership could more easily justify taking action on behalf of the local. It was a trap: once the sit-in began, Ryan tarred the local with accusations of Communism, and he appealed to the ILA membership to defend the union from the irresponsible agitators. It is especially telling that anti-Ryan, pro-reform locals from the Irish West Side docks, 895 and 791, rather than take the opportunity to demonstrate a broad interracial front against Ryan, heeded his call and came to his defense against Local 968.

There were brief flashes – but no more – of a stronger, more genuine solidarity. In 1907, a portwide strike was triggered by black longshoremen who demanded that their wage be brought up to that of the white workers. Another portwide strike in 1919 saw broad participation among all the ethnic groups working the waterfront. Even here, however, the pier-to-pier nature of the experience of work on the waterfront meant that Irish strikers confronted Italian strikebreakers, Italian strikers confronted

black strikebreakers, black strikers confronted white strikebreakers, and so on – creating highly conflicting memories of allies and enemies loaded with racial and ethnic meaning across the port. The most interesting of the moments of interracial solidarity was produced by utterly singular circumstances. This was the Irish Patriotic Strike of 1920, a boycott of British shippers waged by rank-and-file longshoremen and allies without support from the ILA (indeed not a single strike on the New York waterfront had the backing of the ILA between 1916 and 1948). With the Irish War of Independence in full swing, Daniel Mannix, the Irish émigré archbishop of Melbourne, Australia, gave a speaking tour in the United States in support of Irish independence. Landing in San Francisco and then moving eastward by rail, he concluded his tour in New York before boarding the White Star liner *Baltic* at Pier 60 in Chelsea, the heart of the Irish ILA, bound for Ireland. British authorities refused Mannix entry into Ireland, intercepted the *Baltic* and arrested him, bringing him ashore at Penzance, England. When the *Baltic* returned to New York, back to one of the Chelsea piers that serviced the White Star ships, a group of Irish and Irish American women picketed and called on the ship's coal passers to walk off the ship in protest of Britain's treatment of Mannix. Many walked out, and the longshoremen joined the strike in sympathy. As the Irish picketers went from pier to pier, Italian and black longshoremen joined the strike as well.¹⁸⁹

Why should black workers have joined the strike? It is, of course, impossible to ignore the fact that previous experience suggested that a refusal to join the strike could spell retaliatory violence on the part of the Irishmen. At the same time, however, there was genuine sympathy for the Irish cause in the context of an increasingly popular and influential black nationalist tradition, at the time organized mainly under Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Black longshoremen

¹⁸⁹ Nelson, 30-38.

were among those closest to the culture of the black Atlantic, whose politics had been deeply impacted by Garvey's movement. Composed of interwoven networks of African American, West African, and West Indian activists and intellectuals, the black Atlantic was host to an internationalist and anticolonial milieu, many of whom saw the centuries-old Irish struggle for independence as a model and an inspiration – and, for many, a struggle against their own English oppressor.¹⁹⁰ Garvey himself harkened to Irish nationalism, with Harlem's Liberty Hall likely a deliberate tribute to Dublin's Liberty Hall, and the slogan "Africa for the Africans at home and abroad" carrying some echo of the Irish slogan "the Irish race at home and abroad." The black seafarers who sailed from port to port and the black longshoremen living and working in port cities and towns all around the Atlantic rim acted as a sort of nervous system of the black Atlantic, delivering and synthesizing news of, and perspectives on, black (and other) movements throughout the world. When the Irish picketers in New York raised the slogan, "Ireland for the Irish, Africa for the Africans," it no doubt fell on sympathetic ears.

But such favorable political conditions were fleeting, and the interracial character of the strike failed to leave a lasting mark on race relations in the port. Winning black support on the question of Irish independence was not reason enough for Irish longshoremen to cede ethnic monopolies on their piers. The New York ILA never so much as hired a black organizer even well into the post-World War II era, despite the presence of an all-black local and thousands of black members across several New York locals. Despite a few dogged efforts by radical reformers, an alternative vision for waterfront unionism never found fertile ground, and the Irish Catholic base of the organization conferred a popular and strident antiradicalism and anticommunism; indeed, the ILA's anticommunist bona fides helped to legitimize the organization and shield it from external criticism of its corruption and hostility to racial

¹⁹⁰ Nelson, *ibid.* This view of the "Black Atlantic" is from Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), 1-40.

equality. The violence of the gangsters, the AFL's strong association with the Irish Catholic working class, the embeddedness of the ILA to New York power brokers, and the conservatism and increasing defensiveness of Irish longshoremen proved hostile terrain to progressive challengers, and the CIO made no headway in this quagmire.¹⁹¹ Only the onslaught of technical change, especially containerization, ultimately shifted the balance toward a more favorable position for black longshoremen, when the more spacious facilities on the New Jersey side of the harbor in Elizabeth and Port Newark began getting more of the business as the old and obsolete Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Hoboken piers hemorrhaged jobs. In these New Jersey ports – precisely because of a lack of piers over which to wage wars for racial and ethnic turf – more racially egalitarian work-sharing arrangements had emerged. Something beginning to resemble racial equality in the Port of New York only could emerge as capitalist development swept away the material basis of the waterfront's old ethnically-constituted working class.

Even more than the Jim Crow waterfronts of the South, the history of longshoremen's unionism in New York demonstrates that there is nothing inherent to longshoring that pushes workers to broad-based solidarity even within their own occupation. Instead, New York demonstrates the narrow and defensive response to capitalist exploitation, with solidarities emerging but only extending as far as necessary for economic protection and no further. In fact, the New York longshoremen represent a case

¹⁹¹ The Catholic Church was one of the most important organizational vehicles for antiradicalism in American life. Unlike in European countries, where union movements were aligned with socialist parties and the Church supported the establishment of separate Catholic workers' federations, the labor movement in America only had socialist forces within it competing for dominance, and in this context the Church counseled participation in a "mixed" labor movement to ensure a counterweight to the radicals. The Catholic position on the labor movement – set down by Pope Leo XIII in his 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum* – was that, while workers had often been abandoned to a vicious *laissez-faire* market system, the solution was not socialism or class conflict but a return to principles of Christian social justice by both workers and employers. Opposition to socialism (and later communism) in particular was "a serious duty incumbent on all Catholics and, according to Catholic historian Vincent McQuade, 'was acknowledged by devout Catholics to be the fundamental issue' within the unions" (Seaton 1981, 17). The above-mentioned reform efforts among white New York ILA locals 895 and 791 are interpreted by Nelson as "intra-Catholic" struggles: to put it crudely, between liberal and conservative interpretations of (anti-socialist) Catholic social doctrine (77).

of the centrality of non-class identities in the process of class formation in early capitalist development in the United States. Ties of kinship, neighborhood, and ethnicity were central to the development of the organization of the longshoremen in New York. Ethnic ties not only bound work gangs and locals together, but tied Irish workers to Irish bosses, and indeed represented a fully-fledged *padronismo* on Italian piers. It had been these ethnic networks that had provided a measure of economic security in competitive labor markets prior to the arrival of the ILA; the ILA, for its part, was interested to draw in revenue from dues payments, kickbacks, and loading rackets, and saw no reason to upset the old arrangements.

Aside from section 2.5. below, on the Great Lakes, an understanding of the character of New York longshoremen's unionism is probably the most central for understanding the events described in this case study, because New York was the gravitational center of the whole organization by the time the Milwaukee local reemerged, and because the international leadership was involved in the conservative reforms of the local in 1942. The particularities of the development of the ILA in New York, then, were not irrelevant to the scene in the Great Lakes (or elsewhere) later.

2.2. Philadelphia and the IWW¹⁹²

When durable waterfront unionism was established in the Port of Philadelphia – the nation's third busiest, after New York and New Orleans – in 1913, it could hardly have come in a form than it had in New York. The relative disorganization of the employers in both ports was an asset to workers' organization in both cases, but the similarities seem to end there. Here, the difference is clear on the surface: the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), specifically its Marine Transport Workers (MTW)

¹⁹² This section is based on material from Cole (2007) except where otherwise noted.

section, rather than the ILA, won the loyalty of the Philadelphia waterfront workers. Philadelphia's MTW Local 8 casts a unique figure both in the history of waterfront unionism and in the history of the IWW. Unlike most other of the well-known events in the history of the IWW, in which the union led heroic struggles but failed to consolidate their organization, fading away as quickly as they appeared, Local 8 enjoyed real longevity. Local 8's pragmatism also set it apart from the ideological and sometimes sectarian tendencies of its parent organization. While it upheld the IWW's principles of direct job control and opposition to signing restrictive contracts, it also loaded munitions and made a no-strike pledge during World War I, won (temporarily) recognition as the sole bargaining agent at the port from the US Shipping Board, and sought to restrict the labor supply by increasing the membership initiation fee to \$25, in violation of the IWW's \$2 fee rule.

In the history of waterfront unionism, Local 8 is perhaps the most outstanding model of proactive, principled, militant interracial solidarity. It was not merely that black and white longshoremen worked in mutual toleration of one another. Rather, the leadership took care to ensure that every national group was represented in the decision-making bodies of the organization. The IWW's 1912 strike in the Lawrence, Massachusetts textile mills had provided the model. Among the Lawrence strikers there were no fewer than fifteen nationalities speaking over forty dialects; the IWW's approach was to establish strike committees in which every national group was ensured a representative. In the 1913 strike of Philadelphia longshoremen that would confirm Local 8's hegemony on the docks, the union took the very same approach: electing a strike committee of fifteen and ensuring that every ethnic group would have at least one representative. Local 8 continued to follow this model in the formation of future strike committees, but they also cemented such practices in the normal operating procedures of the union, instituting a policy of racial rotation in top leadership whereby a black and white president and vice-president would switch positions every month. The union's bylaws also held

that, at all times, at least one of the union's two secretaries, responsible for the day-to-day direction of the local, must be black. Finally, Local 8 enacted and enforced the racial integration of work gangs.

This degree of purposeful and genuine integration – taking place not just at the level of membership but in the representational structure of the organization and at the worksite – is probably unsurpassed in the history of waterfront unionism in the United States. Without a doubt it is totally contrary to the New York pattern. What accounts for the success of interracial solidarity in Philadelphia? It *cannot* be explained by friendlier race relations in general in the "city of brotherly love." Prior to Local 8's rise, waterfront employers could easily seize upon the existing hostilities among Irish and black workers throughout the nineteenth century, and the Philadelphia Irish, just like their countrymen in New York, frequently resorted to anti-black violence to assert their proprietary claims to work, space, and status in the city and on the docks. In Philadelphia as in New York, observers of history can chart the transformation of black waterfront strongholds into Irish ones as the latter forced the former out.

But the Philadelphia Irish were not so successful as the New Yorkers in establishing monopolies in the waterfront labor market. Philadelphia had a much larger black population than New York by proportion, and black workers had always been a larger proportion of the waterfront workforce. More importantly, workers' organization in the years at the turn of the twentieth century was weaker in Philadelphia than New York, and Irish longshoremen were simply incapable of preventing employers from hiring whomever they pleased. While elsewhere the rise of the ILA coincided with declining numbers of black longshoremen, the weakness of unionism in Philadelphia (and perhaps employers' belief that black workers were more resistant to organization) allowed the number of black longshoremen to grow. By 1910, out of 3,063 longshoremen, 1,369 (45 percent) were black. Still, according to a 1928 study by the Urban League, there was an "intense race hatred that existed between

whites and blacks on the waterfront prior to 1913, in the community and among longshoremen as a result of keen competition between the workers".¹⁹³

The Irish did not disappear from the Philadelphia waterfront, but they became a less predominating element as they enjoyed some upward mobility into skilled and professional occupations and as later Irish immigrants tended to come from higher classes of labor than their famine-era forebears. Patterns of immigration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – increasingly from Southern and Eastern Europe – also drove a shifting ethnic composition of the waterfront. Foreign-born whites were the second largest group of longshoremen after blacks in 1910, representing 844 or 27.5 percent of the total, and half of the whites. Poles and Lithuanians made up most of these men. Another 440, or 14 percent, were of foreign parentage, and roughly the same proportion of native parentage, this latter group comprising most of what was left of the Irish presence on the docks.

The earlier weakness of longshoremen's unionism led to a situation in which the demographic composition of the Philadelphia waterfront was more conducive to interracial cooperation. The lion's share of the workers were black, and the Irish were no longer attempting to monopolize the work by the time Local 8 came into the picture. Fewer than half of the foreign-born workers spoke fluent English, and so deferred to English-speaking workers, often black, when it came time to deal with employers.¹⁹⁴ Moreover, Polish and Lithuanian workers were still considered to be among the "inferior" races of whites, and their process of "becoming white" was still in progress during the 1910s; they were still often relegated to unskilled work, differentiated from white men in popular discourse, and treated

¹⁹³ Quoted in Cole, 15.

¹⁹⁴ This particular pattern – foreign-born, non-English speaking workers following the lead of black workers – seems to appear in a few other contexts as well, and it would be interesting to know how typical it was among cases of interracial solidarity through the mid-twentieth century. Stephen Meyer (1992) notes a similar situation at the Allis-Chalmers facility in Milwaukee, whose workers in one of the foundries – a majority of whom were white, many of whom were foreign born – elected a black shop steward. Blacks were a small minority of the Allis-Chalmers workforce, only about 700 out of 18,000 in 1945.

poorly by the descendants of older English, Irish, and German migrants. At least in these respects, the basic demographic conditions for interracial solidarity were more propitious in Philadelphia than in New York and other North Atlantic ports, where white workers had succeeded in maintaining monopolies on the work, and also the South Atlantic and Gulf Coast ports, where there were many fewer new immigrants and more "fully" white workers accustomed to American racial mores.

Demographic features, however, are never a sufficient explanation. If the ILA had succeeded in organizing Philadelphia, they would have most likely set up a segregated biracial arrangement as they had in many other ports, rather than the IWW's radically integrated model. MTW Local 8 built a culture of interracial solidarity by inscribing it directly into their representational machinery and devoting resources to education and propaganda designed to spread a class-based identity among their members. Across racial and ethnic lines, longshoremen debated questions and made decisions together in a highly participatory and democratic organization. Perhaps most crucially, they established control of hiring on the Philadelphia waterfront: to find work, a man needed to have his dues paid up and wear an IWW membership button, and accept the terms set by the union, including working in a racially integrated gang. If a man was not willing to accept membership in the IWW because he could not stomach integration, he could not work on the waterfront. More than that, the IWW won real improvements in terms of wage increases, work time restrictions, and more respectful and dignified treatment from the stevedores. The IWW, moreover, could appeal to the longshoremen as *men*, exercising a radicalized version of the waterfront's masculinist norms that brought workers together not only based on their class, but on their gendered sense of control and self-determination on the job – a

virile syndicalism.¹⁹⁵ For men who may have been skeptical about the matter of interracial unity, surely the Local 8 offered favorable tradeoffs both in material and status terms.

By the time of the Great Depression, however, MTW Local 8 was history, and the ILA organized the Philadelphia waterfront. The story of Local 8's downfall is largely one of repression. Many of its leaders were rounded up and thrown in prison as part of the wartime campaign against sedition – despite the fact that Local 8 faithfully served the war effort at the behest of its leaders. The Shipping Board, under the administration of former ILA president T.V. O'Connor, acted to undermine Local 8 whenever it had the opportunity. The employers also maintained a vigilant opposition to Local 8, unlike many of their counterparts in ILA-organized ports. The ILA, for its part, maintained a consistent effort to recruit away from the IWW, going as far as to supply strikebreakers against Local 8.

While this practical conspiracy between the state, the employers, and the ILA may have been sufficient to ultimately rout MTW Local 8, there were other pressures driving instability and tension. For one, its pragmatism cost it the support of the IWW, from which it was expelled on the grounds of the \$25 initiation fee which enabled the local to cling to some control of the labor supply. That supply was undergoing considerable growth as the Great Migration came to Philadelphia and increasing numbers of men were looking for work on the waterfront. White Philadelphians also met the Great Migration with increasing racial resentment and hostility, and deteriorating race relations in the city made life more difficult for the union, especially as tensions began to appear in the sugar refineries that represented an important part of the waterfront labor scene. The southern migrants, for their part, were largely unfamiliar with unionism and industrial work, and quite reasonably found it difficult to see white

¹⁹⁵ The concept of virile syndicalism to describe this phenomenon was developed by Francis Shor (1992). I encountered it in Cole (2007).

workers as allies. Tensions among black workers and between the new migrants and those born and raised in Philadelphia, also complicated matters for the local.

Most importantly, however, Local 8 was routed in a strike in 1920, and again in 1922, after which employers made the port an "open shop." A three-way competition between what remained of the IWW, the ILA, and the independent Philadelphia Longshoremen's Union led by former Wobblies ensued. Race relations on the waterfront worsened – years of relative peace gave way to occasional outbreaks of violence. After years of total domination by the employers, by 1927 the ILA emerged as the victor after appropriating some of the IWW's demands, whereupon it recast the waterfront in its own image: the dreaded shape-up returned, corruption crept in, wages declined, democratic procedures disappeared, and the work gangs were resegregated. Thus, one of the most extraordinary experiments in interracial unionism in the era of the nadir of race relations in America was ended, an island of solidarity sunk back into the sea.

2.3. New Orleans¹⁹⁶

Waterfront unionism in New Orleans represented another high watermark of solidarity, which stands out for the fact that it took place along essentially Jim Crow principles in adaptation to the social and political reality of the South. What New Orleans longshoremen proved was the possibility of a quite remarkable and genuine solidarity in the context of formal institutional segregation. The biracial – rather than properly interracial – longshoremen's unionism of New Orleans reveals the cracks in the color line in the period during and just after the era of Reconstruction, and how workers managed to retain an extraordinary degree of solidarity even as that line hardened into the twentieth century.

¹⁹⁶ Information in this section comes from Arnesen (1994) for the time period up to the Twenties and Nelson (2001) for the Depression era, except where otherwise noted.

As in other Southern ports, black men had long supplied the labor necessary for waterborne shipping in New Orleans as cargo loaders and unloaders, riverboat men, teamsters, and various other occupations. Prior to the Civil War, many had been slave laborers. While they were generally excluded from checking and weighing and, of course, from supervisory positions, black workers nevertheless came to occupy many of the most essential and "aristocratic" skilled positions. Unlike the ports of New York and Philadelphia, New Orleans was much more heavily dependent on the movement of a single commodity, cotton, and the cotton screwmen – so called for their use of great big jack screws to compress bales of cotton to squeeze more of it into the holds of smaller ships – were indispensable to the port's most important function.

The work of the cotton stowage had once been the preserve of white screwmen, but by the 1870s black workers had gone some way toward breaking up the monopoly: the white Screwmen's Benevolent Association, apparently finding it impracticable to totally exclude black men from the work, instead limited the number of black screwmen's gangs to twenty, or one hundred men, per day. The black screwmen had organized their own Screwmen's Benevolent Association No. 2 in 1870, which the white SBA incorporated in 1877. The same decade saw the organization of separate white and black unions among unskilled groups such as the longshoremen, cotton yardmen, draymen and teamsters, and other waterfront trades. Cooperation among these unions emerged almost immediately, with the Longshoremen's Protective Union Benevolent Society (the black association) and the United Laborers (the white) issuing their demands to employers together and striking together in 1872, in the most well-disciplined strike of longshoremen that the port had seen up to that point.

The economic depression of the 1870s undercut the organization that had begun to emerge, but with economic recovery at the end of the decade, biracial unionism returned stronger than ever. The Cotton Men's Executive Council, a coordinating body of waterfront organizations founded in 1880,

consolidating somewhat fitfully over the next few years, and lasting through the mid-1890s, expressed a tactical unity across racial lines, and across the considerable skill hierarchy which, significantly, differentiated workers *within* racial categories. While the independent union locals within the Council were all segregated, the Council itself had an integrated leadership structure. The Council successfully established a "half-and-half" work-sharing agreement between the white and black locals of the various trades, maintained united fronts in contract negotiations, and enforced adherence to a single set of work rules and wage rates throughout the port. The wages of black and white workers had been equalized by 1886. This pattern set by the Council would, with a couple temporary breaks, carry on until the victory of the employers against the unions in the 1920s. When the Council began to falter in the late 1880s, the fault lines opened on the distinctions of craft more than on those of race. Racial conflicts were not absent, but craft conflicts and resentments often became the basis for interracial craft-based alliances against other occupation groups.

As stable alliances began to break up, however, racial tension among the screwmen in particular finally spelled the end of the Council in 1894 when the white Screwmen's Benevolent Association informed stevedores that they would not work for any employer who hired black screwmen, and a period of conflict and violence followed. This would prove a temporary setback, as the Dock and Cotton Council, established in 1901 and coming to represent some 36 independent waterfront unions, restored biracial and inter-trade cooperation on the waterfront. The Dock and Cotton Council, like the Cotton Men's Executive Council before it, was not a perfect model of racial equality. Certainly, the white men within it were not untainted by the ideology of white supremacy, even if they were enlightened enough not to descend into its vicious excesses for the sake of their own economic interests as waterfront workers. More than that, however, the Dock and Cotton Council always had a white president, and blacks never higher than vice president or secretary; and the white section never accepted the half-and-

half principle for foremen, who were overwhelmingly white, and objected when the black workers proposed the extension of the policy to that occupation. Compared to the Cotton Men's Executive Council, the Dock and Cotton Council had a colder, more formal approach to cooperation across divisions of race and skill, as opposed to the more passionate spirit of solidarity that defined the former for a time. Still, aside from these limitations, the equal work-sharing arrangement (apart from foremen), wage equalization, the integration of work gangs, interracial representation in decision-making, and interracial united fronts in contract negotiations produced one of the most conspicuous exceptions to the main tendency of race relations in New Orleans, the South, and the nation.

By the 1920s, the Dock and Cotton Council was unraveling. The power of the screwmen had been undermined by technical change, as mechanized presses and the use of larger and more modern vessels rendered their labor redundant. Entire unions vanished from the council as the trades they organized disappeared. Most of the member organizations that did remain were, by the end of World War I, affiliated to the ILA. In 1923, when contracts for screwmen and longshoremen expired, they struck – above the objections of most of the black and some of the white unions. The employers saw an opportunity to impose the open shop and crushed the strike when they obtained a federal injunction against the strikers, forcing them to keep off the docks. The employers were victorious, and the Council scattered.

After the defeat of the Council, the employers turned over control of hiring to a black labor contractor, and the open shop era saw a sharp decline in the hiring of whites. Clerks and checkers were white, but some 75 percent of the longshoremen were black by the Depression era, and an even greater proportion of banana handlers, freight car loaders, warehousemen, and cotton compress workers. The passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act in 1933 set off a wave of new organizing under the banner of the ILA, to which employers responded by setting up company unions. Joseph Ryan, for his

part – against the wishes of the locals in New Orleans – simply sought to affiliate the company unions, which was done in 1936. The Port of New Orleans now had two ILA locals, established by the employers: Local 1418, which was white, and Local 1419, which was black.

While the ILA locals suffered to some extent from corrupt and self-aggrandizing leadership, black workers stuck with their local even when they had a chance to join the more radical, openly pro-integration and pro-civil rights ILWU. When the election between the ILA and the ILWU was held in 1938, the radical alternative suffered an overwhelming defeat. Among twenty companies, the ILA won eighteen and the ILWU only one (neither union had a majority in the other). The total vote count for the ILA was 2,054; for the ILWU, only 553. While the ILWU suffered from intimidation and brutality from New Orleans police and ILA thugs, the more important reason for their defeat was their failure to appreciate the tradition of "separate-but-equal" unionism in New Orleans, how much it had accomplished for black workers, and how deeply tied in all-black labor organizations were to black civil society at large. With the waterfront having become one of the few sources of stable employment for black workers, and where they seemed – unlike anywhere else – to have a real advantage in obtaining work over whites, the ILWU's campaign to equalize employment opportunity must have sounded like a potential loss. The ILA, for its faults, had come to represent both unity among workers and racial solidarity among black people in a deeply racist society. The ILA in the coastal South had, perhaps more than any other organization, been a conduit for working-class black people to achieve economic stability and wage civic and political influence in their own communities and in local and state politics. The "enlightened" organizers of the ILWU had only racist and condescending explanations for their rout; but

they ran a campaign on a "strictly trade union" basis against an organization that provided a great deal more than strictly trade union benefits to black workers.¹⁹⁷

Compared to the ILWU longshoremen of the Pacific, Local 1419 compared poorly in a few ways: they never restored direct union control over hiring and endured an employer-run hiring hall, had somewhat lower wages, and greater disparities across trades. But the ILA incorporated black workers into its ranks at every level, provided paid staff jobs for black men, protected access to work on the waterfront for the black longshoremen, and was embedded in the city's black community. In these respects, segregated unionism was a genuine expression of self-determination. At any rate, their leadership markedly improved in short order, with the company union leader being ousted in 1940, and later leaders endorsing more aggressive negotiations with employers. There were even still inspiring moments of interracial unity, as in 1952 when black workers struck after police arrested two of their fellow workers and the white locals refused to report for work in solidarity. Ultimately, the pattern established by the old Cotton Men's Executive Council worked, and black longshoremen were perhaps even more resistant to integrating their organization than their white counterparts. Throughout the coastal South, the ILA remained largely segregated until 1982, when, finally, a federal court order forced white and black locals to merge.

What accounts for the extraordinary solidarity in the early period of this summary? Arnesen suggests two main factors: the independent strength of the black unions made it more practical for white workers to cooperate with rather than exclude them, and the idiosyncrasies of political culture in New Orleans made that solution easier than it might have been elsewhere. While these seem clearly

¹⁹⁷ The ILWU did make some headway in the city – legendary black activist Lee Brown was a leader of ILWU Local 207, which organized river barge loaders – but only where the ILA had little or no history (Brown and Allen 2001, 53-59).

important, his research uncovers at least two other factors that seem critical. The first, mentioned above, is that skill hierarchy did not neatly correspond to racial difference. Unions organized on a craft basis might have a basis for interracial unity in the defense of the prerogatives of their shared craft. The second is another effect of the relative strength of the early organizations on New Orleans waterfront: from at least 1880 on, the shape-up is conspicuously absent. "In none of the descriptions of the waterfront...does there appear an account of large gatherings of men on the docks awaiting employment. It is likely," continues Arnesen, "that individuals or groups of workers contracted directly with stevedoring offices, eliminating the day-to-day shape-up altogether".¹⁹⁸

Technological change, economic crises, and the hardening of Jim Crow norms eroded the basis of solidarity, but in the face of these corrosive forces biracial unionism proved surprisingly tenacious in New Orleans. While the history of other Southern ports may lack the dramatic demonstrations of unity displayed in the four or five decades about the turn of the twentieth century, stable work-sharing arrangements between racially segregated locals were typical. No doubt that, as in New Orleans, these arrangements often tended to confer certain privileges to the white longshoremen. Nevertheless, the segregated unionism of the South seemed to provide some clear advantages to black longshoremen compared to their counterparts in the North Atlantic. It is significant, as mentioned above, that the members of these black locals were generally not in any hurry to integrate.

2.4. San Pedro and the ILWU¹⁹⁹

The International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) was born in 1937 when the Pacific Coast District of the ILA, under the leadership of the left-wing international vice-president Harry Bridges, broke

¹⁹⁸ Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers*, 41.

¹⁹⁹ This section is based on material from Nelson (2001) and Kimeldorf (1988) except where otherwise noted.

away from that organization to join with the CIO. West Coast waterfront unionism, like that in Philadelphia and to a lesser extent the Gulf Coast, had a history of radical syndicalism under the banner of the IWW. The base of occupational recruitment of West Coast longshoremen was also largely made up of former loggers and sailors, who had their own traditions of struggle for job control. After enduring the open shop years of the 1920s, many former Wobblies, some now associating with Communists, were core organizers of the ILA as it came to its feet in the docks of the Pacific. After the 1934 West Coast waterfront strike, or the "Big Strike" as it was known by its participants, the waterfront unions of the Pacific Coast succeeded in establishing an unprecedented degree of workers' control on the docks. The cornerstone of their power was the union-controlled hiring hall, in which job dispatchers were elected by the workers annually and stevedores suffered a total loss of the right to choose men or gangs.

Therefore it is not surprising that, in contrast to the ILA's "apolitical" approach to racism, the ILWU openly branded itself a progressive union committed to civil rights. The Communist Party – which in the 1920s was the premier majority-white antiracist institution – played a highly influential part in shaping the political culture of West Coast longshoremen's unionism. Yet at the time of the ILWU's founding, there were hardly any black longshoremen on the West Coast. It would remain to be seen whether and how the union would accept black workers when they came onto the docks.

In this regard, developments in San Francisco's Local 10 were extremely encouraging. During the 1934 West Coast waterfront strike, whose center of gravity was the San Francisco waterfront, Bridges personally went to the black community, speaking at churches to ask congregants to join the picket lines. Black San Franciscans heeded his pleas. "Almost without exception," said Bridges, "they stuck with us. They helped us. The employers were frustrated in their attempt to use them for scabs" (quoted in Nelson, pp. 96). With the rise in labor demand during the war years, port employment ballooned to

some nine thousand men, more than two thousand of whom were black. By 1946, about 25 percent of Local 10 was black, active as officials and informal leaders, and allied or associated with the local's left-wing. The ILWU, even Bridges personally, developed a reputation in the city as a genuine friend and asset to the black community. The Baptist Ministers' Union president called Bridges "a Godsend among men; civil rights activist Carleton Goodlet said the ILWU, along with the small Communist-led Marine Cooks and Stewards Union, were "the guardians of the Negro community and its economic backbone".²⁰⁰ Local 10, by virtually all accounts, lived up to the ILWU's official pronouncements on antiracism and civil rights, and developed a reputation – which it holds to this day – as being one of the most politically class-conscious and internationalist labor union locals in the country.

Yet other ILWU locals did not adhere to this admirable standard. The working class politics of the West Coast were influenced not only by left-wing syndicalists, socialists, and communists, but even more consequentially by a deep and popular tradition of racist exclusion. Virulent anti-Asian racism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries inspired the formation of whites-only unions in the West. While the ILA had no formal whites-only policy, only twenty-three black longshoremen worked on the entire West Coast by the time the Big Strike began in 1934 – these men probably having gotten their start on the docks breaking an all-white longshoremen's strike in 1919. In the 1920s, Oregon stood out as a major center of Ku Klux Klan recruitment and activity. Local 8 of Portland was frequently a public embarrassment to the ILWU leadership by its adoption of *de facto* whites-only policies persisting into the 1960s. When port employment grew by the hundreds in wartime, Local 8 added not a single black member, despite the rapid growth of the black population of the city.

²⁰⁰ Quoted in Nelson, 97-98.

San Pedro's Local 13, which worked the Port of Los Angeles, also departed significantly from Local 10's example. Local 13 met the wartime expansion not with total exclusion, as Local 8 had, but with hostile inclusion, and the erection of one barrier after the next to black longshoremen to becoming full members of the union. For the most part, racial separation on the job remained the rule. Because of the way the hiring hall worked, any man dissatisfied with his partner or his gang – for any reason whatsoever – could simply return to the hall, who would send a replacement, and wait for the next job to open up. Walter Williams, who had been the leader of an antiracist opposition group within the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers (an AFL craft union) when he worked at a shipbuilding company and an organizer for the CIO Industrial Union Council in Los Angeles, said that some of the old-timers – members of the Big Strike generation, men with personal and deep connections to the radical past – would refuse to work with a black longshoremen. Williams, one of the first black men to go to work on the San Pedro docks, recalled a general atmosphere of tension and bitterness: "It's a strain on a person to have to work in an atmosphere where he knows that people have these racist feelings. From time to time you have to listen to racist remarks and control yourself, or try to control yourself anyway... You had a lot of brawls. You had a lot of fights down there...over name calling [that] involved racism".²⁰¹

In addition to the system of job distribution allowing white workers to segregate themselves, the local reached an agreement with the employers in 1945 that held that no man could be a gang boss, a winch driver, a forklift driver, or carpenter until he had been at work in the industry, on the Pacific coast, for five years. No black men had been members of Local 13 before 1942; the new rule, while cast in ostensibly neutral language and justified in terms of the principle of seniority, ensured that no black

²⁰¹ Quoted in Nelson, 113.

longshoremen could access the most desirable jobs on the waterfront. The new ceiling demoted some men.

The most infamous affront to black workers, however, came with the distribution of layoffs and rehires. In 1946, with the end of the war, there were suddenly several hundred men too many looking for work on the waterfront; without layoffs, some low-seniority men would only be able to get work once every two or three weeks. Thus, Local 13 decided to unregister about five hundred of the least senior men and place them on an unemployed list, with the understanding that there would be no new men hired before these five hundred. This group would become known as the Unemployed 500. Half of them were black, and the layoffs eliminated about 90 percent of the local's black members. While this could be officially justified on strict seniority grounds, some of the white members of the local took the opportunity to gloat that "this union was lily-white before you guys came down here, and [now] it's going to be lily-white again".²⁰²

Local 13 violated this promise to first hire the men of the Unemployed 500 repeatedly; and when they kept it, they privileged the white men among their ranks. The local continued to register the sons and nephews of longshoremen taking their first jobs on the docks (the "sponsorship" hiring system) ahead of the Unemployed, as well as members who had taken jobs at other locals during the war. By 1949, several hundred men had been reregistered, among them only 58 of the Unemployed – all of whom were white, some of whom were less senior than some of the black Unemployed. In 1947, the employers suggested that all the Unemployed be reregistered, but Local 13 refused in favor of the policy of privileging return transfers and kin. Bridges' attempt the same year to get the local to accept a compromise position was rejected. Finally, in 1951, about a year after Korean War labor demand led to

²⁰² Quoted in Nelson, 115.

the reregistration of 138 of the Unemployed, the local voted in favor of a policy to restrict employment only to those who had been a Los Angeles County resident for ten or more years, excluding anyone who had moved to the city responding to wartime labor demand or after.

What can account for the difference between Local 10 and the official policy and pronouncements of the ILWU leadership, on the one hand, and the racism of Local 13, on the other? The strength of kin-based hiring in Local 13, whereby to find work one must first be sponsored by a union member in good standing – generally a father, uncle, cousin, in-law, or friend of one of these relations – tended to impart a strong imprint of family and ethnicity on work relations and made for a more "natural" tendency to perceive and portray black men as outsiders not only on account of racial difference but also their non-membership in the family networks of the workers. But resistance to black membership ran deeper than this; Al Langley, a white member of the local who began working the docks in 1934, remembered a "kind of vigilante group of ultra-conservative[s]...who had never been around blacks, or else they were southerners," whose opposition was not just a "passive" one rooted in a local tradition of hiring family members, but an active determination to keep black workers off the docks. It is especially significant that members of the '34 generation were among the enthusiastic participants in the exclusion. One factor for this difference from their Local 10 compatriots, in addition to the fact that ties of family and ethnicity were so central to the composition and identity of Local 13, may have been the absence of black workers from the picket lines in San Pedro during the Big Strike, whereas in San Francisco interracial unity was deliberately constructed for the event by top ILWU leadership.

Indeed, whatever the origins of this rank-and-file racism, it might be Harry Bridges' policies toward Local 13 (and Local 8 as well) that played the strongest role in ensuring its continuation. It was not out of the question for the ILWU to revoke the charter for locals who refused to abide by principles of racial equality. In 1945, when the Stockton Unit of Local 6 refused to work with a Japanese American

who had just been released from a wartime internment camp, Bridges intervened personally to influence the local to change its course. When a majority of the rank-and-file refused to sign pledges affirming their commitment to racial equality, Bridges suspended the local and reportedly tore their charter off the wall in disgust before returning to San Francisco. No such intervention was forthcoming, however, for the locals in San Pedro or Portland. In fact, when Walter Williams, representing the Unemployed 500, came to Bridges to ask for his support in pushing the local to abide by nondiscrimination language in the contract, the latter coldly declined, saying "I'm not going to upset Local 13 over the race question."

How could this be the same Bridges as the one known in San Francisco? For one, the ILWU had other principles besides racial equality, and sometimes upholding these other principles came into tension or contradiction with antiracist commitments. The clearest commitment was to seniority which, because not two dozen black longshoremen worked on the West Coast prior to wartime, would obviously tend to benefit white workers when it came to layoffs or access to more desirable jobs (the compromise Bridges urged with Local 13 regarding the Unemployed 500 was to use port-specific seniority in place of the local's procedure of counting time worked at any ILWU port). Local autonomy – a principle generally upheld by the ILA as well – also militated against intervention in these cases. But the most important reason that Bridges did not intervene was crudely political. San Pedro (Los Angeles) and Portland were, along with Seattle and San Francisco, two of the four most important locals in the union. The ILWU was still threatened by its competition with the ILA. It might be one thing to pull the Stockton Unit's charter – it was another to hand Portland over to their rival. The question of whether or not to intervene was also, of course, crudely political. Local 13, for its part, had a history of being an "anti-Bridges" local, and with black workers a numerically insignificant proportion of its membership, the discrimination issue did not provide him a useful issue to build support for his own leadership. This is

in contrast to the situation in San Francisco, where Bridges' antiracist stances encouraged a large black membership to ally with him and the local's left-wing against a rising conservative faction.

The example of Local 13 brings into relief a few important aspects of the general history of longshoremen's unionism in particular, and race and class formation in general. First is the basic claim of the "whiteness studies" historical literature on the working class: even where an international union may have a well-earned reputation for enlightened positions on racial equality, the agency of white workers themselves can drive the persistence of racial divisions. Second, while the general tendency is for democratic and radical unionism to be associated with racial egalitarianism, local democracy and control on the job – unparalleled on the ports organized by the ILWU – are not impervious defenses against racialized class formation.²⁰³ In this case, such institutions *enhanced* white workers' agency as they constructed and reinforced racial exclusions at the Port of Los Angeles. Third, neither was a living tradition of political radicalism a surefire defense. Many rank-and-file Local 13 members, especially of the Big Strike generation, had been influenced by Communists or members of the Party themselves, but nevertheless defended and enforced racist policies or refused to work with black members; meanwhile, Bridges declined to intervene.

2.5. The Great Lakes²⁰⁴

Of all the longshoremen of all the coasts of the United States, perhaps least is published about the longshoremen of the Great Lakes. The ILA, so powerfully identified with the longshoremen of New York, was born in the Lakes. The first sparks of organization were lit in 1870 by lumber handlers along the banks of the Saginaw River in Michigan, exclusively engaged in the movement of felled timber to mills

²⁰³ On the association between union democracy and racial equality, see Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin, 232-265.

²⁰⁴ This section is based on material from Larrowe (1959) and Russell (1966) except where otherwise noted.

and milled lumber to market. But the great commercial hub of Chicago would be host to the first effective longshore local on the Lakes – also initially an organization of lumber handlers – and represented the center of gravity of the new National Longshoremen's Association formed in Detroit in 1892. The union was renamed the International Longshoremen's Association in 1895 to reflect the inclusion of Canadian locals. By 1905 the organization claimed 100,000 members, half in the Great Lakes (and none, yet, in New York City).²⁰⁵

The Great Lakes maritime industry was notoriously difficult to organize. Because the Lakes were icebound for some four months of the year, the work had a much more seasonal character than anything found on the other coasts that forced a greater transient character on much of the industry's workforce. The workers of the Lakes waterfronts, as well as the seamen for that matter, were likely to be from – and, when the Lakes froze, bound to return to – rural and small-town areas. Unlike the men of the Eastern waterfront who were exposed to Atlantic seafarers with radical political traditions, or the men of the Western waterfront many of whom had themselves been radical seafarers in the Pacific, the Great Lakes represented a more insular, regional social world. Lake vessels did not go to the oceans, and until the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway in 1959, deep-draft ocean vessels could not navigate the Great Lakes system.

The employers of the Lakes, for their part, achieved much stronger organization than their Atlantic counterparts, and upheld a hardline, even ferocious anti-unionism. A brief period (1885-1892) of mutual raiding and turf wars between the Cleveland Vessel Owners Association, representing mainly bulk carriers, and the Lake Carriers' Association (LCA), representing passenger liners and package freighters, provided some reprieve to maritime workers' efforts to organize. But in 1892, the employers

²⁰⁵ René De La Pedraja, *A Historical Dictionary of the U.S. Merchant Marine and Shipping Industry Since the Introduction of Steam* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 316.

amalgamated under the LCA and began to enact a policy of extermination of the unions. The LCA set up a non-union worker recruitment operation in New York City, hired professional spies and thugs, and established legal defense funds for strikebreakers and company strongmen to defend any men arrested during fighting. Yet two features of employers' organization probably also contributed to the organizational success of the ILA compared to the other maritime unions. First, the LCA organized the vessel owners, who were mainly concerned to destroy the unions aboard their ships, but not the stevedores with whom they contracted for waterfront labor. Second, the early longshoremen's unions, rooted in lumber handling, dealt considerably more with the "other" LCA, the Lumber Carriers' Association – who were also "viciously" anti-labor, but weaker, smaller, and less successful than the Lake Carriers. The lumber carriers' industry was already on the decline by the time the group organized in 1898, as the region's supply of timber dwindled and as railroads increasingly preempted lakewise shipping. Between their own weakness and the ILA's temperance, the lumber carriers were evidently pacified.

The ILA stood out as the most successful of the maritime unions on the Great Lakes. The driving force behind the lumber handlers' organization in Chicago and then the expansion of the ILA geographically and into other waterfront trades was the archconservative Dan Keefe. Keefe was a lifelong Republican who, even under the pressure of his own organization, refused to ever endorse a Democrat. In the 1880s, as the leader of the Chicago lumber handlers, he kept his organization aloof from the campaign for the eight-hour day – practically an epochal movement for Labor, especially in that city. In 1900 Keefe was, along with AFL head Samuel Gompers, a founding member of the National Civic Federation (NCF) – an organization of employers, union officials, academics, and clergymen that advocated for class collaboration between capital and labor and opposed the "radical" elements of both classes. He was a personal friend of Ohio Senator, industrialist, and Republican National Committee

chairman Mark Hanna, who was the NCF's first president, and owner of the M.A. Hanna Company that in 1909, under new leadership, would try (and fail) to destroy the ILA in the Lakes employers' offensive of that year. Keefe used his 1901 ILA convention keynote speech to praise the virtues American businessmen, modestly define labor's just share as proportionate to its "ability to create profits," and condemn the IWW and the remnants of the Knights of Labor.²⁰⁶ By 1908, Keefe had become the prototype of the "tuxedo unionist", increasingly a reflection of the employer in style, dress, and comportment – in addition to ideology, which he had evidently long shared.²⁰⁷ His choice to endorse Republican William Taft for president in 1908 put him at odds with the rank-and-file of his own union, and with the AFL leadership whom he had already alienated in his jurisdiction battles with the ISU; after Taft's victory, Keefe gracefully resigned the ILA presidency to avoid certain defeat in reelection.

Given the hostile circumstances, the ILA's early conservatism, coupled with Keefe's dictatorial control of the organization, may well have been a central factor in its organizational success. Employers found in Keefe a negotiator who shared their commitment to capitalism. He offered them long-term contracts with no-strike clauses and a promise to furnish strikebreakers (ILA members if available, non-union men if not) to the employer in the event any members struck during the life of a contract, in exchange for the closed shop and modest increases in wages. For some longshoremen, the loss of the strike weapon – and the willingness of their own union to supply non-union men to break their solidarity – may have seemed a bridge too far, but on the other hand the arrangement meant protections for union members and an end to some of the most abusive practices on the waterfront.²⁰⁸ For many of the

²⁰⁶ Russell, 71.

²⁰⁷ De La Pedraja, 289.

²⁰⁸ Larowe quotes Toledo longshoreman and future ILA president Anthony Chlopek's statement as a member of the National Adjustment Commission: "When I started to work on the docks myself I had to board on the docks, and I had to spend all the money I earned in the saloon if I wanted to work on the docks.... Years ago men working on one dock...were not paid any salary, or no money was paid to them whatever. They were privileged to run a boarding house bill right on the premises of the docks..." (U.S. Shipping Board 1918, quoted in Larowe, 16).

employers, the discipline Keefe promised made it reasonable to recognize the union – especially because a strike at the end of a shipping season could trap a ship and its cargo in the harbor for months. But Keefe also had a method for whipping the more reluctant employers into line: if any ship was loaded by non-union men, the ILA local at the next port added heavy cargo handling fees. The successful administration of this system – the effective enforcement of the no-strike clauses on workers, and of the scab-loading charges on employers – required a network of spies and informants spread across the Great Lakes and loyal to Keefe. While Keefe never exactly upheld a philosophy of industrial unionism, it crept in through the backdoor as the ILA took in whatever lake shipping workers it could, including those in other unions' jurisdictions.²⁰⁹ Keefe's industrial unionism was one not of solidarity but of interunion competition.

After 1908, President T.V. O'Connor's administration kept his predecessor's authoritarian and class-collaborative principles but dropped Keefe's industrial pretensions, focusing on expanding its reach among longshoremen's and other trades safely within its jurisdiction. The ILA would continue its policy of eschewing broader solidarity in favor of its own particular interests in the disastrous Great Lakes maritime strike of 1909. The 1909 strike was a great defensive battle against the employers' open shop drive, in which all of the seamen of the Great Lakes fought courageously against long odds to defend unionism in the industry: the marine engineers under the Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association

²⁰⁹ The most important of these conflicts was the attempt by the ILA to organize the marine firemen. In fairness to Keefe, it was the craft conservatism of the AFL's International Seamen's Union that drove marine firemen – by rights an ISU occupation – to the ILA. The leadership of the Great Lakes ISU were skilled men who had worked the sailing ships, and were dismissive of the less-skilled men who worked the coal-powered steamers. To paraphrase the adage, the iron men of the wooden ships did not wish to bring in the wooden men of the iron ships, who were a threat to the craft – and so the marine firemen looked to the ILA, who obliged. Only after the ILA drive demonstrated the firemen's enthusiasm for organization did the ISU insist on their jurisdiction; the AFL ruled in the Seamen's favor. The jurisdictional struggle between the ISU and the ILA would ignite a generations-long rivalry between the two unions. The acrimony would prevent the cross-union cooperation as the ILA repeatedly proposed the formation of a marine trades department in the AFL while the ISU, under the leadership of Andrew Furuseth, repeatedly refused.

(MEBA), and the sailors, marine firemen, marine cooks and stewards, and the masters, mates, and pilots under the International Seamen's Union (ISU). Only one group decided not to join the strike and continued to work for the duration: the ILA.

The union's conservatism helped it to survive the open-shop drive while the other maritime unions faced ruin and would have to wait for the wartime conditions before being able to reestablish themselves in the Lakes. By 1918, the ILA was entrenched, representing dock workers in many of the important grain and coal ports, and still holding onto the closed shop agreement with the Lumber Carriers' Association. The tugmen, also represented by the ILA, were organized in every major port, with contracts that compared favorably to those of their counterparts in the Gulf and Atlantic Coasts. The state had ratified the ILA's presence on the docks with a tripartite federal agency to arbitrate disputes during wartime. But in the postwar economic slump, the ILA's cautious moderation could no longer protect it as the employers succeeded in forcing all the maritime unions into dormancy within the first few years of the postwar decade. The ILA would not be a major force on the lakes again until the Depression era.

Little is known about racial and ethnic relations in the Great Lakes ILA. Because the work was undesirable for many reasons – low pay, dangerous conditions, unsteady – we might expect the dock workforces of the Great Lakes to be disproportionately composed of the surrounding community's most vulnerable men: black men and recent immigrants. Gene Vrana's data on the Milwaukee port tend to confirm this expectation. In 1910, nearly 70 percent of the port's longshoremen were foreign-born, as compared to one-third of all male workers in Wisconsin; in 1920, the gap widened as the proportion of foreign-born longshoremen held steady. In the early ILA era, most of these men were Polish, especially among the freight handlers, whereas hoisting engineers at that time tended to be Irish and Scandinavian. It is also established that the ILA allowed and encouraged ethnic division among its

members by chartering craft groups with explicit ethnic designations (e.g., Slavonian Ore Handlers, Italian Coal Heavers, Colored Longshoremen), and such charters continued to be issued into the 1920s. It is not known whether or to what extent this policy was followed in Milwaukee but there is no doubt of its use in the Great Lakes. Where such segregation was absent between locals, it may well have been present within them. In 1905, ore shovelers in Cleveland's Local 205 were ethnically divided into Irish, German, Polish, Croatian, and "mixed" work gangs; these mixed gangs themselves segregated into smaller ethnically defined work subgroups.²¹⁰

When the Great Lakes ILA was resurrected in the Depression years, black workers were at the core of the effort in Milwaukee and probably elsewhere. Work gangs were racially integrated in at least two ports, Milwaukee and Buffalo.²¹¹ Larowe's research on the lakes seamen suggests that by the World War II years, they were still unwilling to accept the prospect of working alongside too many black men, with employers making use of the National Maritime Union's own anti-discrimination pamphlets as anti-CIO literature; such rigid racist exclusions apparently did not become the standard for dockside work. Aside from these impressions, unfortunately, little else can be said about race relations on the Great Lakes waterfront, and the matter still awaits basic historical research.

2.6. Race and waterfront workers

A few general observations arise from this brief summary of race relations among longshoremen in the US. For one, the ILA took no clear or specific policy on racial or ethnic discrimination – black

²¹⁰ Commons, 64.

²¹¹ Clear evidence of racial integration at the work gang level in Milwaukee emerges out of checking names on gang lists against demographic data from the Census and draft registration cards. E.g., ILA Records, Volume 2, Box 1, July 19, 1940; Volume 4, Box 1, Oct 20, 1941. Evidence for Buffalo comes from a photo of a gang published in A.H. Jansson, "Great Lakes Package Freight Trade-III," *Marine Engineering and Shipping Review* 42, no. 10 (1937): 534.

longshoremen could rise through the ranks to international leadership, emerging out of locals in the Gulf Coast or South Atlantic, while locals in the North Atlantic kept blacks out or relegated them to disempowered, practically auxiliary locals. The ILA's approach was strictly, even coldly, pragmatic, deferring to locals to decide for themselves whether and how they would include black workers. Thus, the ILA ran the gamut from outright exclusion and marginalization of black workers, "separate-but-equal" inclusion of black workers, as well as genuine integration, depending on the time and local situation. On the Pacific Coast, the ILWU took an explicit advanced position on civil rights, insisting on integration of black workers on equal terms. But here, too, the incoherence of race relations in the ILWU – radical inclusion in Local 10, exclusion in Locals 8 and 13 – can only be understood as an effect of an essentially pragmatic approach that prioritized other internal political questions over the principle of equality.

The *laissez-faire* stance on race that the unions took meant that the characteristics of the workforce at the time of organization played a large role. By the time the ILA began making headway in the South, there was already a history of biracial labor organizing, and black workers were simply too numerous and entrenched for white workers to be successful in shutting them out of the industry – the failed attempt of the white screwmen of New Orleans to monopolize that most prestigious job is a case in point. In New York, by contrast, the deeply Irish character of the workforce, and the overwhelming commitment among the Irish longshoremen to privilege kin and countrymen over anyone else, underpinned their success in excluding black and other workers in Manhattan. With the expansion of the workforce, they may not have kept blacks off the docks altogether, but they had little trouble hanging on to the most desirable docks, the plum jobs, and the union leadership.

The most conspicuous feature of longshoremen's unionism in the United States is perhaps the juxtaposition of deep conservatism versus strident radicalism, and authoritarian versus democratic

organizational impulses, represented most clearly by the split between the ILA and the ILWU. But it must be emphasized that racial practices did not neatly correspond to these distinctions. Both organizations practiced a version of local autonomy that created considerable internal variation around racial dynamics. While the ILA might intervene to break an unauthorized strike or overthrow an insurgent local leadership, locals were empowered to set their own rules for recruitment, including setting registration fees; and while the ILWU was concerned to ensure coast-wide standards in contracts, the leadership would stand aside from exclusionary practices if it seemed politically risky to intervene. Here only the IWW stands out as consistent – rather than simply adapting itself to local conditions, MTW Local 8 created an island of interracial solidarity and racial integration in Philadelphia's hostile terrain. And interestingly, in this case, the *lack* of local autonomy in recruitment practices helped to breakdown what the Wobblies built, when the international leadership suspended the local for raising its registration fees in response to a labor glut, crucially isolating and weakening it. In the main, however, the necessary conclusion is that one cannot infer from a union's left-wing bona fides that it was consistently advanced on the question of racial equality, nor from a union's conservatism that it was consistently backward.

Aside from the stance of the unions, changing economic and industrial conditions also exerted some influence on race relations. Perhaps more than any other single factor, containerization broke up the white monopolies in New York, as the technical shift favored New Jersey ports where more egalitarian work-sharing arrangements had been organized. In the South, the mechanization of cotton pressing undermined the power of the screwmen, who had been the linchpin of biracial unionism, and their organization was broken. Even more generally, the chaos of the business cycle was a constant threat, as economic slumps often drove workers to narrow their expectations and become defensive and insular, and encouraged employers to take the offensive. Such dynamics suggest the fragility of

interracial solidarity, being built under particular conditions for the purpose of addressing the specific problems posed by those conditions, and quickly destabilizing when the winds shifted.

3. The Political Context of Milwaukee Waterfront Unionism: (How) Did the Socialists Matter?

While Daniel Keefe, the principal organizer and first president of the ILA, was conservative and a Republican, his man in Milwaukee was a Socialist. Frank Weber worked as a lake seaman and joined the Lake Seamen's Union (after 1892 part of the ISU) in 1868, the following year becoming an early and active member of the Milwaukee Knights of Labor which Keefe had eschewed in Chicago. Weber soon distinguished himself as an organizer and leader of the labor movement: he helped to found the Milwaukee Federated Trades Council (FTC) in 1887, of which he would serve as secretary from 1902 to 1934; he was the first president of the Wisconsin State Federation of Labor (WSFL), from 1893 to 1917; and in 1888, he organized carpenters and longshoremen in Milwaukee, the latter being the first ILA local in the city.

Weber and his comrades fought to forge a strong connection between the local and state labor movements on the one hand and the Socialist Party's electoral efforts on the other, in stark contrast to the AFL's official apolitical stance. Their efforts were a total success: by the turn of the century, they had built an "interlocking directorate" of leading personnel between the unions and the party.²¹² The first leaders and principle organizers of the FTC were socialists; the FTC's first constitution was drafted by two Socialists; the FTC unanimously endorsed the Social Democracy of America (predecessor to the Socialist Party) in 1897, and sent its own delegates to that party's first convention in the city in 1898; seven FTC member unions – representing blacksmiths, brewery workers, brewery teamsters, cigar

²¹² Marvin Wachman, *History of the Social Democratic Party of Milwaukee, 1897-1910* (Urbana: UI Press, 1945), 40.

makers, coopers, hod carriers, and joiners – also independently endorsed socialism, sending their own delegates to the SDA convention; by 1899, the entire executive committee of the FTC was comprised of socialists.²¹³ Weber himself served five (non-continuous) terms as a legislator in the Wisconsin State Assembly as a Socialist from 1906 to 1926, at the same time as he sat at the helm of the FTC and WSFL, in addition to being the chairman of the statewide party organization.

The election of 1910 demonstrated the potency of the union-party alliance, when the Socialists, having steadily built strong ward-level organizations in working class areas of the city, took control of the mayoralty and the Common Council. The prominence of the Socialist Party in city politics would remain Milwaukee's most obvious distinction from other cities deep into the century. But 1910 would always be the Party's zenith: after 1912, they would never again win a majority of the Council seats; the drive to war increased the distance between unions and the party, as the AFL gave its full-throated support to the war effort while the Socialist Party opposed it; and the Twenties brought devastation to the labor movement and growing isolation to the Socialist Party.

Still, the party managed to cling to the mayorship and keep some representation on the Common Council throughout the decade leading up to the Great Depression. Yet Weber's personal role in organizing the waterfront and the strong connection between the AFL and the Socialist Party in Milwaukee did not seem to have left a lasting political impression on the longshoremen. Perhaps reflecting the conservatism of the ILA, the patronage networks of the Milwaukee Democratic Party organization, or both, Local 18 – one of several craft locals confederated into the Milwaukee ILA – was led in the early Twenties by John J. Bonk. Bonk, born in Two Rivers in 1879, was the son of a Polish immigrant and was working as a longshoreman in Milwaukee by 1900. While Local 18 president in 1922,

²¹³ Gavett, 95-96.

Bonk became the Democratic candidate for the 5th Assembly District, in order to run against Socialist incumbent Herman Tucker. The Democratic Party had almost no sway in state-level politics at that time, holding onto relevance in Milwaukee as a key part of the "Nonpartisan" anti-Socialist coalition after the Socialist victory over Democratic Mayor David Rose in 1910, in that capacity mostly representing Irish and Polish Catholic blocs within the city.²¹⁴

The growing number of black workers on the waterfront likewise did not seem to confer a Socialist alignment to the longshoremen's union when it was reestablished in 1934. Unfortunately, there is no systematic study of the relationship of the Milwaukee Socialist Party to the city's black community. Trotter's *Black Milwaukee* still provides the clearest impression of the relationship, with a few intriguing and suggestive details. The pre-World War II black community was politically active and assertive, but split in various ways, developing from a small, geographically dispersed, and relatively prosperous community of professionals and wage earners in the mid-19th century to a larger, more geographically concentrated, and more internally class divided community by the World War I years. Tensions between old Northerners and new Southerners, and between community elites and a growing proletarian constituency, contributed to serious conflicts. An acrimonious political struggle over the leadership of the NAACP led ultimately to its going dormant by 1930, leaving only the less activist, more service-based Urban League as the major center of gravity for civil rights activities. Black voters were likewise split along party lines: Republicans fared best in the black community, but the Socialist Party commanded substantial support.²¹⁵ Socialist mayor Dan Hoan was generally popular and did win some goodwill when

²¹⁴ Even then, the Irish and Polish did not break Democratic in sufficient numbers -- or were not present in sufficient numbers -- to make the Democrats serious contenders for state-level office in this period. For instance, in the 1922 election, not one Democratic candidate won a majority of votes in *any* of Milwaukee's twenty Assembly districts. Only in two districts did the Democrat get the second-most votes, and one of those was a two-way race without a Republican contender; in every other case they fell behind both the Republicans and the Socialists, or did not field a candidate at all (*Wisconsin Blue Book* 1923).

²¹⁵ Trotter, 115-44.

he joined the NAACP executive board in 1920 and spoke aggressively against the Ku Klux Klan; the *Milwaukee Leader*, the party's local paper, was also recognized by the NAACP branch secretary as being the friendliest white publication in the city to the black community.²¹⁶ Yet the Socialist Party, indeed in Milwaukee as nearly everywhere else in the country, made no special effort to organize black people into its movement.

Nevertheless, some leaders and activists within the black community seem to have recognized in the Socialist Party a potentially effective vehicle for self-determination and joined up with it despite the party's own negligence. Most notable was the enthusiastic participation of leading Garveyites in the Socialist Party – an unusual alignment in the history of these two movements. In Milwaukee, the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA, Marcus Garvey's organization) had a major presence, especially among the black working class, and at an interesting time: while the organization had been in decline at the national level since Garvey's deportation to Jamaica in 1924, it was still on a growth trajectory in Milwaukee for several more years, not reaching its peak until the early Thirties.²¹⁷ UNIA's emphasis on emigration was also not a priority for Milwaukee's Garveyites, who concerned themselves with the more immediate interests of black workers. In the slump of the early Twenties, for example, the Milwaukee UNIA organized a campaign to block the importation of strikebreakers into the city, making the almost certainly correct calculation that white workers would make no distinction between black strikebreakers and native black working-class Milwaukeeans, and that the latter's right to the city may be thrown into question. Ernest Bland and Carlos Del Ruy, both leading Garveyites in the city, were members of the Socialist Party.

²¹⁶ Jack Dougherty, "African Americans, Civil Rights, and Race-Making in Milwaukee," in *Perspectives on Milwaukee's Past*, ed. Margo Anderson and Victor Greene (Urbana: UI Press, 2009), 146.

²¹⁷ Trotter, 125.

UNIA took the leading role in organizing a cross-class, intra-racial effort to elect Milwaukee's first black alderman in 1932 – near the height of their influence, with several hundred members in the city. They spearheaded the formation of the Federated Council of Clubs (FCC), which included dissident clubs within the Republican Party base seeking to dislodge the traditional black leadership by reorienting to working class constituents, black Socialists, and Garveyites, all demanding adequate representation of black people in city government. When the FCC endorsed attorney George Hamilton to run in the aldermanic primary for the Sixth Ward, traditional leaders who opposed UNIA and the reformers fielded Republican tailor and churchman C.L. Johnson. The split vote put Hamilton in third and Johnson in fourth, keeping both black candidates out of the main contest for the seat. A unified black vote would have put a candidate in the running. With no black candidate, most black voters in the Sixth voted for incumbent Nonpartisan Samuel Soref, while Garveyites Bland and Del Ruy backed Socialist challenger Ernst Schultz. Soref won by a decisive margin, but Schultz managed to win considerable support.²¹⁸ In 1936, black Sixth Ward voters united behind prominent attorney and NAACP leader James Dorsey, part of a crop of younger black professionals in the city who, in the Depression era, developed stronger attachments and sympathies to the working class than their predecessors; his bid was unsuccessful, but he made a respectable showing with 43.6 percent of the vote. He ran again in 1940, losing again by a less than two percent margin.²¹⁹

The onset of the Great Depression and the rise of the New Deal, of course, made for rapid shifts in the city's political terrain. Revulsion with the Republican Party's "stand-pat" approach to the

²¹⁸ It bears mention that Soref, while not a Socialist, was a militant progressive who went on to join up with the Farmer-Labor Progressive Federation in 1934 (see *Jewish Daily Bulletin*, June 14, 1934). The fact that the Sixth Ward already had one of the city's most liberal alderman no doubt contributed to the feeling among some leaders that opposing him would be a mistake.

²¹⁹ Trotter, 210. The first black alder in Milwaukee would come from the same Sixth Ward, but not until 1964, when Mrs. Vel Phillips was elected amidst civil rights agitation in the city.

Depression and the renewed legitimacy of class politics spelled quick gains for the Socialist Party in 1930, reversing nearly a decade of defeats and disappointments. With the anti-Socialist Nonpartisan majority in the Common Council, however, Mayor Hoan's capacity to respond to the crisis was restricted to setting up soup kitchens and denouncing his opponents' obstructionism. But even that appeared to pay off, as 1932 proved a banner year for the Socialists: Hoan was reelected by an overwhelming margin, and the party regained control of the Common Council for the first time since 1912 with the help of two maverick Nonpartisans who backed a Socialist for the position of council president.

Yet other challenges and challengers were already on the horizon, and in retrospect 1932 looked less like a revival and more like a last gasp. First, the Democratic Party emerged, for the first time since the 19th century, as a serious contender for office in Wisconsin. Despite the essentially conservative nature of the Wisconsin Democratic Party, the national party's New Deal program opened up the Wisconsin Democrats to liberal realignment. The popularity of the New Deal and the possibility of the Democratic Party to become a genuine conduit for liberalism shifted the field in challenging ways both for Socialists and the Progressive faction of the Republican Party. Second, the New Deal finally did crack the Republican Party factions apart, when Progressive Republicans – disgusted and alarmed by the national party's aloofness and obvious decline – decided in 1934 to launch their own Progressive Party. The Progressives, who had widespread support throughout Wisconsin, represented a far more viable third-party project than the Socialists at the state level, and their appearance on the scene forced Socialists to make a choice between maintaining their own ideological and organizational coherence at the risk of increased isolation, on the one hand, or maintaining their relevance by cooperating with Progressive forces at the risk of liquidating themselves as a distinctive formation, on the other. Third, the Depression decade saw the rise in influence of the Communist Party in Milwaukee. Their influence was felt first in the movements of the unemployed starting in 1930, and then even more forcefully in the

labor movement, beginning first as small workplace units before gaining a foothold in the local and statewide CIO organizations, separate from and often in competition with the historically SP-aligned WSFL and FTC. In addition to competing with the Socialists for leadership in these spheres, they managed to peel off some segments of the Socialist Party membership to their own party. Finally, the Socialists had their own problems: the death of a Socialist alderman and the defection of the Nonpartisans meant their control over the Council slipped through their fingers almost as soon as they had finally grasped it.

By the mid-1930s, therefore, the Socialists found themselves fighting a losing battle for influence on three fronts. They increasingly had to compete outright with the Democrats, and more broadly for hegemony among liberal reformist forces. One competitive strategy was to hitch their wagon to the Progressives, who now formed a powerful third party in the state. Here, however, the Socialists would also need to compete for influence within the bounds of their collaboration, and this came with its own risks. Finally, they had to defend their influence over new and old constituencies in the unemployed and labor movements, where the Communists threatened to outflank them on their left. The Socialist Party opted for virtual liquidation into the Progressive Farmer Labor Federation (PFLP), the Progressive-led electoral formation, on the one hand, and a rigid policy of non-collaboration with the Communists, on the other.

This strategy was disastrous for the Socialist Party. The PFLP, in which the Socialists had already played second fiddle to the Progressives, had a very poor showing in the 1936 election; the fusion project was a failure and the Socialist Party got nothing out of it. On the other hand, the sectarian policy toward the Communists also yielded no benefit, as in practice it ceded leadership of the most dynamic areas of labor and social movements to the latter. The Socialist Party's policy made obvious sense in the years 1928-1933, when the Communists followed the Comintern's "Third Period" policy which itself

called for a sectarian orientation to the Socialists and all other liberal or social democratic forces, including the establishment of a Party-led labor federation outside of the AFL. But when the Communist Party turned to the Popular Front policy – directing activists to make common cause with liberal forces in resisting fascism, and in concrete terms to swim with the tide of the New Deal in both domestic and foreign policy – the Socialists' ongoing refusal to collaborate put them in a far more awkward position in the struggle for the street and the union hall.

The Communist Party in Milwaukee in the 1920s was small and not yet a major player in the city's political scene. Fred Blair, longtime functionary of the Communist Party of Wisconsin, reported that when he joined the party in 1929, there were only some 30-40 members.²²⁰ The base of the party and its sympathizers at that time was in the foreign-language federations. The average member was older, foreign-born, of South Slavic, Russian, or Jewish extraction; Blair's recollection was that Croatians were especially well represented. The party had little influence in Milwaukee's larger ethnic institutions of Germans and Poles. National organizers and speakers who came to Milwaukee had trouble mobilizing the local party membership, who were wont to skip English-language events. A 1928 report estimated that 30 percent of the city's membership belonged to the party's South Slavic federation, 20 percent were Finns, and another 10 percent Russian-language, while "almost no" native-born Americans were paying dues.²²¹

As the party ramped up efforts to build its organization, it focused its efforts on recruitment in the city's black community, emphasizing the Socialist Party's failure to address the worsening

²²⁰ Blair's reminiscences come from the Oral History of the Communist Party collection at NYU's Tamiment Library.

²²¹ S. Ani Mukherji, "Reds Among the Sewer Socialists and McCarthyites: The Communist Party in Milwaukee," *American Communist History* 16 (2017), 7.

segregation and racism in the city.²²² To that end the party established relationships with UNIA and the AME Zion Church, and won an especially high-value recruit in Ray Hansbrough, Grand Master of the Prince Hall Masonic Temple. Hansbrough was a coal miner from Kentucky who had taken work at the Liberty Foundry in Milwaukee, joining the Socialists shortly after his arrival; when he became frustrated with the Socialists' refusal to defend the rights of black people in the city, and especially with their willingness to countenance the enforcement of restrictive housing covenants, he joined the Communists and brought several other black foundry workers with him. The black workers at Liberty became the Milwaukee party's first successful factory nucleus, with their own shop floor newspaper; Hansbrough became an energetic and effective organizer, teaching classes on the party's view on trade unions and current events to dozens of students, and then the party's candidate for US Senate in 1932.²²³ It was thus black workers who broke the Milwaukee party organization out of its isolation in the foreign-language associations when they seized it as a potential vehicle for self-determination.

The arrival of the unemployed movement to Milwaukee in 1930 provided the first major opportunity for the party's explosive growth, and it was in this area of work that the Socialists first began to see major losses to the Communists in terms of influence and leadership in the sphere of social and labor movements. Just outside Milwaukee, in Kenosha and Racine, entire chapters of the Socialist Party simply bolted and joined the Communists *en bloc* on the basis of the latter's effective work among the unemployed. The Communists' success in organizing mass rallies of the unemployed in Milwaukee won the interest and respect of many rank-and-file Socialists who had been involved in the same work. When, nationally, the Socialists, Communists, and the "Musteites" united the unemployed movement

²²² A good, brief summary of the history of the development of the black community that highlights the intensification of racism in the city with specific crucial events can be found in the *Central Business District Historic Resources Survey* produced for the City of Milwaukee (1986).

²²³ "Notice of General, Presidential, and Referendum Election," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, November 7, 1932, p. 16.

under the Workers' Alliance of America in 1935, Milwaukee Socialist leaders maintained strict directives not to work with Communists. In 1936 – as their electoral experiment with the PFLP was floundering – they adopted a policy providing that any unauthorized discussion or advocacy for collaboration with the Communist Party through work in any of the Popular Front groups would be considered a violation of party policy and could be met with summary expulsion.²²⁴

As a result, the Milwaukee Socialist Party alienated many of its own members, many of whom drew closer to the Communist Party instead. Fred Blair reported that such figures as Al Benson, who had been Milwaukee County Sherriff on the Socialist ticket, and Leo Krzycki, then the national chairman of the Socialist Party and international vice president of the Clothing Workers union, continued to work with members of the Communist Party on shared projects, especially the Workers' Alliance.²²⁵ None other than Meta Berger flouted the Socialist Party's strict anticommunist policy – the Socialist activist, long-time Milwaukee school board president, and widow of the legendary Socialist party leader and congressman Victor Berger. As the Socialists' recent gains began to unravel in 1936, they virtually locked themselves out of the action in the unemployed movement when they denounced the Workers' Alliance as Communist-dominated. To the extent the policy was enforced, then any member who even suggested collaborating with the Communists could be subject to expulsion; Socialists could not take part in Workers' Alliance efforts without risking their membership. Between the genuine enthusiasm for participation in the unemployed struggle, the waning electoral fortunes of the Socialist Party, and the public defections of high-profile left-wing Socialists on the matter of the party's anti-Popular Front

²²⁴ Beck, 315-17.

²²⁵ Sherriff Al Benson has no relation to Allan Benson, one-time staff writer at the Socialist journal *Appeal to Reason* and Socialist Party 1916 presidential nominee.

policy, many rank-and-filers resigned or simply drifted out of the party rather than risk expulsion proceedings.

A similar dynamic also limited the Socialists' influence in the new labor movement of the Depression era. When CIO began its rise in 1935, the Socialist Party's labor connections were nearly all to the AFL and its bodies – the FTC and the WSFL. Between 1933 and 1935, 50 new industrial unions directly affiliated to the AFL – called Federal Labor Unions, or FLUs – formed in Milwaukee, sometimes edging out more established AFL internationals. The most important of these was FLU 20136 at the massive Allis-Chalmers production facility, which competed with AFL craft locals already organized at the company. Communists had built an operation at the Allis-Chalmers plant in agitation against the company union, and it was Harold Christoffel – a young left-wing Socialist with close connections to Communist organizers there – who would lead the industrial union drive. But all over Milwaukee, as everywhere, the CIO was racking up major victories for industrial unionism as against the old craft form, and against the AFL.²²⁶

Again, the Milwaukee Socialists responded coolly. A crucial moment for defining the political divides in the Milwaukee left came in 1934 with the formation of the Farmer-Labor Progressive Federation (FLPF), an electoral fusion project of the Socialist and Progressive parties. When the Wisconsin Industrial Union Council (WIUC, the statewide federation of CIO unions), sought to join the FLPF as a group – that is, as an organizational coalition partner, rather than simply individual memberships of union members – they were turned away. AFL leaders within the FLPF strongly opposed the proposal to allow group affiliation, and it was rejected by a narrow margin on the grounds that it

²²⁶ Steven Meyer, *Stalin Over Wisconsin: The Making and Unmaking of Militant Unionism, 1900-1950* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

was “a move toward Communist control” of the FLPF.²²⁷ The Communist Party’s proclivity for forming front groups no doubt drove reasonable suspicions that a group affiliation system would quickly lead to a situation in which the Communists would wage influence far beyond their real numbers. The WIUC would urge individual membership to its members anyway, but the FLPF had turned down the support of this new social force in Wisconsin politics before fading away after its electoral debacle in 1936.

Milwaukee and Wisconsin Socialists also distinguished themselves as an anti-CIO force within the national party. When the Socialist Party endorsed the CIO and support for the formation of "Socialist Leagues" within unions at its convention in 1937, the Milwaukee group asked to be made exempt from the SP’s new labor program, condemned the Socialist Leagues as a “Communist Party tactic,” and refused to break from the model of mutual autonomy between the economic (union) and political (party) arms of the socialist movement articulated by Victor Berger.²²⁸ In fact, the Wisconsin party was allowed to ignore the new policy, but nevertheless Henry Ohl and Jack Handley – president and secretary, respectively, of the WSFL – resigned from the party in disgust of its endorsement of the CIO.

The Socialists’ policy vis-à-vis the labor movement, then, was to maintain the hands-off approach to the unions in which they had personnel – a longstanding policy that had led to the slow deterioration of the relationship between the Socialist Party and the labor movement since World War I – and staying more or less aloof from the CIO, which was seen as a competitor to the AFL at best – and a buzzing hive of Communists, fellow travelers, and their useful idiots at worst. The Communist Party’s influence in the CIO could, of course, be greatly exaggerated by detractors and sympathizers alike, but

²²⁷ Gavett, 173.

²²⁸ Berger's organizational vision was what he called a "personal union of the economic and political arms of the movement" (Berger 1902, quoted in Muzik 1960). The meaning of "personal union" was the overlap of leading personnel in the two “arms” – Socialists would lead in the labor unions and unionists would lead in the Socialist Party; each would nevertheless choose the best course of action *within* each sphere on its own terms, rather than systematically attempting to articulate the two in a unified policy or binding one to the dictates of the other. The bodily metaphor Berger invoked is thus not quite apt, unless one adds: two arms, each with its own head.

nevertheless the party could claim some real success in the Milwaukee and Wisconsin Industrial Union Councils. Eugene Dennis, state secretary of the Wisconsin Communist Party from 1935-37, claimed to have “more than one hundred union officials, [and] nearly three hundred of its members active in the CIO and the AFL,” with most of these in the CIO unions.²²⁹ No doubt this success, even if somewhat overstated, was abetted by the Socialist Party’s near total cession of the turf.

Thus, there is little to suggest that Milwaukee's unique situation as the nation's most successful experiment in Socialist urban governance had any direct influence on the development of interracial waterfront unionism in the city. The evidence from the Twenties suggests that the relationship between the labor movement and the Socialist Party was either already disintegrated or indeed never really extended past the person of Frank Weber, with a leading longshoreman emerging as a minor figure in the Democratic Party to *oppose* the Socialist in his Assembly district in the early Twenties. By the time the longshoremen's union reemerged in 1934, the Milwaukee Socialists were in their terminal decline: divisions between the union movement and their party first opened nearly two decades prior had only widened; and they were losing political relevance both as a vehicle of labor-liberalism, as the independent Progressive Party and then the Democratic Party increasingly took that role in the era of the New Deal; and as a vehicle for the far left (including the radical black movement), as the Communist Party advanced its position in the sphere of social movements. Indeed, as will be shown in subsequent chapters, the Communist Party would play a bigger role in defining the ILA 815 in the early years of its revival.

Indeed, if the Socialist Party had any impact on Local 815, it might be that it was entirely negative. The Milwaukee Socialists were early adopters of an aggressive anticommunism, their sectarian

²²⁹ Peggy Dennis, *The Autobiography of an American Communist: A Personal View of a Political Life* (Westport: Lawrence Hill & Co., 1977), 93.

policy meant to isolate and marginalize the influence of the Communist Party (even if, in the end, it had the unintended opposite effect). One expression of this policy was to refuse to accept Aaron Toliver as Local 815's delegate to the Federated Trades Council, on the explicit grounds that they suspected him of being a Communist or having Communist sympathies; thus the local found itself outcast by the AFL, yet risked ugly and damaging intra-union fights if it turned to the CIO. For probably the same reason, the FTC tended to side with rival unions against Local 815 in any jurisdictional or other disputes – a policy which contributed to the loss in 1938 of all the inland warehouses the local had organized, which were turned over to the Teamsters Local 200. The jurisdictional division between marine and inland warehouses would remain a thorn in the side of the longshoremen's union, especially because several employers operated warehouses on both sides of the divide. More broadly, the Socialists' contribution to the general climate of anticommunism helped set the stage for the decisive political conflict within Local 815.²³⁰ International developments in the Communist movement could hardly have helped matters. In August 1939, just as the "little Red Scare" was picking up, the Soviet Union signed the Non-Aggression Pact with Nazi Germany, which many party members and fellow travelers saw as a betrayal of the party's anti-fascist commitments, and which produced a significant rift in the Popular Front which would never heal.²³¹

²³⁰ Chybowski.

²³¹ Isserman, 38, 44.

Chapter 4: The Men of Local 815

In this chapter, I provide an in-depth description of the men of the Milwaukee waterfront to provide a broad sense of the milieu, backgrounds, and lifestyles of the longshoremen of the 1930s. The descriptive account I provide allows for a more systematic assessment against the existing literature on interracial working-class formation and longshoremen's unionism. The first section considers the stereotype of the itinerant longshoremen, whose rootlessness could make him difficult to organize but for whom the union might also be his only stable access to meaningful social interaction. The second section analyzes the pattern of wage inequality among the men and evaluates the effects of that inequality for the stability of the local's pre-1942 character, suggesting that the pattern of wage inequality did not necessarily pose a problem for interracial unity, but did pose a problem for solidarity in general. The third section weighs the question of the foreign born, summarizing the experience of Eastern European migrants to Milwaukee and evaluating the position of the foreign-born longshoremen in the local. The fourth section reckons with neighborhood demographic factors, drawing on arguments from the literature about the impact of residential segregation on interracial organizing and arguing that ward population patterns may have been an important condition both for black and interracial working class politics in the city. The fifth section considers the men on a biographical level for a more qualitative and impressionistic view of their lives to describe the sorts of differences or commonalities not easily captured by basic wage or demographic data.

As mentioned in the last chapter, unionism on the Milwaukee waterfront got its start by the initiative of Frank Weber, who had been a union seaman and a Knights of Labor organizer, and who would become the highest-ranking labor official in Wisconsin and state assemblyman as a member of the Socialist Party – and, fittingly, a vice-president of the International Longshoremen's Association. His

Knights of Labor background suggests a sympathy for industrial unionism, but when he organized the longshoremen under the auspices of the ILA in 1887, it was on an apolitical and craft basis, in keeping with the AFL's "plain-and-simple" unionism. The ILA, rooted first among the lumber handlers, came to represent a federation of independently organized crafts; in Milwaukee, Weber succeeded in bringing together lumber unloaders, coal heavers, freight and salt handlers, ore handlers, grain trimmers, package freight handlers, and hoisting engineers. While the ILA managed to whip the lumber carriers of the Great Lakes into recognizing the union and signing agreements, fewer than half of these craft groups ever won a contract in the period up to 1921. That year, the ILA "marked out" the charter of the last standing Milwaukee local – the package handlers of Local 815, who were crushed in an anti-union drive by the Great Lakes Transit Corporation.²³² Future business agent John Brzek believed that the union was broken up by a vulgar boss trick: the then-business agent accepted a Christmas gift of \$500 from a waterfront employer, who then exposed the leadership as being "on the take." The same employer taunted Brzek in the course of negotiations years later, saying that he "broke the union once and would do it again".²³³

When Local 815 returned to the waterfront, it did so as an amalgamated union of the various remaining crafts; in other words, it took an industrial form. By 1940, 815 had jurisdiction over the general longshoremen, automobile handlers, loaders and unloaders of railway cars, marine warehousemen and checkers, and some of the waterfront cement plant employees. Because the Milwaukee ILA had historically been a federation of several different locals organized into different crafts – Local 815 representing package freight handlers, with other locals for lumber handlers, coal heavers, tugboat men, grain trimmers, and other occupations – it was by no means obvious that all the

²³² Vrana, 14.

²³³ Chybowski, 10.

workers of the waterfront would be a part of the new, amalgamated 815. Grain trimmers, for instance, a relatively more privileged occupation group, had since been organized by another union and would not be brought into 815 until the late 1950s. Workers on Milwaukee's coal docks were also not immediately organized into the revived local.

Who were the men of Local 815, and does the question shed any light on answering the questions posed by this study: what accounts for the rise and decline of radical interracial unionism? One of the two existing secondary sources on the union offers these descriptions of the men as fundamental in shaping the character of the local and its "chronic problems": "[Longshoremen have] little investment in human capital, are poorly motivated, have poor work records, histories of tardiness and absenteeism, are prone to petty theft, and are often ghetto residents.... Many of Local 815's members in the 1930s were rough and reckless characters. Many were alcoholic or otherwise unfit for steady employment. Others were simply desperate because the 1930s economy had not provided enough well-paying, steady jobs".²³⁴

This unflattering picture is based on a general set of stereotypes about workers in secondary labor markets, on the one hand, and John Brzek's reports to Chybowski in interviews and correspondence, on the other. No doubt there is some truth in it. There were, after all, many desperate men in the Thirties; meanwhile, industrial discipline and a strong enough belief in the sanctity of property to outweigh hunger are only learned with intensive and ongoing socialization. Yet the author, in noting the exceptional success of the local – being, again, the only local in the Great Lakes region to win a union-controlled hiring hall – makes no real attempt to inquire as to the characteristics of the men who can claim credit for this achievement. Nor does he speculate as to the reasons for the triumph of

²³⁴ Chybowski, 5; 12.

interracial unionism in the local. In this chapter, therefore, I hope to provide fuller descriptions of the Milwaukee longshoremen, more systematically rooted in available empirical data, to attempt a better explanation for Local 815's character, not to mention a fairer and more dignifying description of the men who built it.

To that end, working with two membership lists, one from 1938 and another from 1942, I compiled a list of 271 men, most of whom appear on both lists. On account of the nature of waterfront unionism – which seeks to protect members' interests fundamentally by restricting the labor supply – this figure radically undercounts the actual number of men who worked the docks, most of whom were "casuals" who would not be full members of the local, and therefore not listed in its membership rolls. Eugene Vrana's summary study of the local gives an impression of the disproportion: in 1947, Local 815 only counted 123 full members; the Census, which also systematically underestimates the count due to the itinerancy of longshoremen and the erratic demand for labor in the industry, counted an average of 400 longshoremen in the whole state in the period from 1940-1950; yet the local paid per capita dues for 4,555 men in the same period.

I used the Ancestry genealogical website to find material on each of the 271 men found between the two membership lists. Of these, I could find no information whatsoever for fifty, other than the home address provided by the membership lists themselves. For the remaining 221 men, I was able to obtain at least some additional information, ultimately reviewing 519 documents. These are mainly pages of various Census records and draft registration cards, but also include some military enlistment records, ship manifests, naturalization petitions, and other miscellaneous items.

By this method, the basic demographic composition of the local circa 1940 can be ascertained: of the 208 men for whom I have racial data, 71 (34 percent) were black and 137 were white.²³⁵ Of the whites, 56 (41 percent) were foreign-born. On the New York waterfront some twenty-five years earlier, observers were struck by the "absence of young men" on the docks; an observer of waterfront labor in Milwaukee on the eve of World War II might have said something similar, with the average 815 member clocking in at nearly 40 (mean: 39.6; median: 38). Casual longshoremen may well have been younger, but they left the docks for other work as soon as it came along before becoming full members of the union. The foreign-born members were even older, an average of 47 years old compared to black workers' 37.7 and native-born whites' 36.

1. Stability and itinerancy

A crucial part of dock workers' cultural image is their itinerancy, an image no doubt based in part on the irregularity of employment at any given port. The extent to which organizers confront a peripatetic workforce rather than a fixed one has, of course, major implications for organizing; irregular workers that are here today, gone tomorrow are not easily convinced to devote their efforts to winning gains in which they will not partake. No doubt this element of waterfront work has contributed to the difficulties of organizing longshoremen. Historians, however, have tended to find a more complicated picture – while many longshoremen certainly led unsettled and wandering lives, considerable numbers of them were anchored in their local community, stayed put, got married, and raised children. Data on

²³⁵ Eugene Vrana using only the membership lists infers race based on a surname analysis, assuming non-Anglo surnames identify white workers and Anglo surnames include black workers. In 1935 he estimates that 47 percent of the membership had Anglo surnames, with this figure increasing to 62 percent in 1940 and falling again to 40 percent in 1951 – these changes reflecting the rise and then fall in the relative number of black workers with the wartime increase in labor demand, followed by the return of veterans displacing black workers. Performing the same operation on the 63 names for which I could not find a confirmed racial category, the proportion of black members in the combined 1938 and 1942 lists increases to 39 percent.

Milwaukee's longshoremen seem to present a picture of a relatively stable workforce. Of 102 members for whom 1940 Census records were found, ninety-eight were listed as living in the same place five years prior. Several of these had lived in Milwaukee since at least 1930. Of the native-born workers, at least nineteen (11.5 percent) had been born in Milwaukee; at least forty-five (26 percent) in Wisconsin. Additionally, I was able to confirm, through Census or draft registration records, that at least 40 percent of the men were married. This may be an underestimate, as there is a considerable amount of missing data. In addition, some of the unmarried men were not freewheeling bachelors, but widowers.²³⁶

No doubt these figures are influenced by the fact that the only membership data 815 kept was on full members – casual men and provisional members are not counted, and no doubt they were if anything less rooted. Nevertheless, the full members of 815 thus seemed to be relatively established in the community. Some Milwaukee longshoremen, according to longtime leader John Brzek, went to San Francisco to work the docks there when the Great Lakes shipping season ended; my analysis of the union's documents only confirms three instances of this (counting one who went to Los Angeles, not San Francisco), so presumably it was a distinct minority of the men, who at any rate made Milwaukee their "home base." The comparison of the two lists also allows for a calculation of the rate of worker turnover that indicates a quite stable core of members: from 1938-1942, ILA 815 had an average of 207.5 members, with only 33 men dropping from the membership rolls, making for about a 4% annual rate of membership turnover in the period. The presence of many familial ties within the membership also suggests a certain fixity; at least fifteen pairs or triplets of relations, typically brothers but occasionally father and son, belonged to 815 in these years.

²³⁶ In fact, an even greater proportion of the membership may have been married men in the Thirties than in the Fifties and Sixties, years after the local had "matured". In 1959, apparently two-thirds of the local's members were unmarried, with an older average age of 47 (compared to around 40 for the Thirties). This reflects the advancing marginalization of waterfront work, the major changes in the units represented by the local, or both.

Yet the seasonality and low wages of waterfront work necessarily imposed an experience of precarity on the men, and many seemed to have lives more resonant with the archetypal dock worker. Eighteen lived at Milwaukee's Community House, a shelter for homeless men; eleven of these men were foreign-born. Twenty-one more lived at one of three boarding houses: two, like the Community House, were located by the waterfront, just south of the confluence of Milwaukee's three rivers; the third, reflecting the city's increasing racial segregation, was an all-black boarding house on the north side of the Menomonee in the Sixth Ward. One man lived at a home for disabled veterans; another was incarcerated at the Wisconsin State Prison in Waupun at the time the Census was taken. Aside from the implication of poverty, the concentration of men living as boarders could indicate a preference for temporary housing on account of a desire to chase work around. Aside from the men who went to San Francisco, records indicate that a few members may have occasionally traveled to Chicago to find work, and at least one to Canada.

In general, however, the membership of ILA 815 were more or less permanent members of the Milwaukee waterfront community – on both sides of the Menomonee. That fact would tend to give the members a bigger stake in the organization, a greater interest in seeing it established, a more profound reliance upon it, and a deeper subjection to its discipline – in other words, the sedentary workforce makes it easier for the organization to cohere and maintain basic support for its existence. At the same time, however, the same phenomenon contributes to more risk aversion among the rank-and-file – indeed, given the circumstances of the industry, risk aversion may have been an essential basis of the union's popular support. The observation of a major New York stevedore may have applied here as well: "After a man works [at the trade] ten or fifteen years, he gets into a groove and is not good for anything

[else]".²³⁷ Some of the men were already housing insecure or lived in dilapidated conditions and seemed to have little going their way. For the men raising a family at home, they must have sympathized with their workmates – and saw a glimpse of their own potential future. Indeed, in contrast to the standard hypermasculine figure of the hard-drinking nomad-worker, the conservative, post-1942 leadership of Local 815 sought to cultivate an image of domesticated masculinity for Milwaukee's longshoremen – men who could be trusted to give an honest day's work, who did not look for trouble, and whose demand for better wages was rooted not in fortune-seeking but in their role as their families' provider. In short, many had good reasons, especially given the general trend of the Lakes shipping industry and after having already achieved some considerable improvements, to avoid playing with fire. The fragility of the union's early militancy described in the second section of this chapter is less surprising in this light.

2. Wages and inequality

Wage data for ILA 815 members reveal a union struggling not only with the low annual wages imposed by a seasonal shipping schedule, but also wide inequality among the men. In this section I offer observations on wage patterns based on wage data for 85 of the men found from the 1940 Census, after excluding several men whom the Census noted as being engaged in a different occupation or unemployed for that year. The typical annual income of an 815 member was between \$750 and \$800 (mode \$800, median \$750, mean \$776). There was a wide dispersal of wages, from \$150 at the

²³⁷ Quoted in Nelson, 6.

minimum and topping out at \$1820; the standard deviation (*s*) is \$306, and the interquartile range (IQR) \$300.²³⁸

Men's wages varied based on their occupation, mode of shipment, hours worked, and cargo handled. A 1939 contract with W.A. Sellon, the Great Lakes Transit Company's labor contractor in Milwaukee, indicates the different wages paid within a given boat gang. General longshoremen and automobile drivers were paid 75¢/hour between 7:00 A.M. and 6:00 P.M. ("straight time"), and 85¢ between 6:00 P.M. and 7:00 A.M. or on holidays ("overtime"); winch and hoist operators made \$1.05/hour on straight time and \$1.20 for overtime. All received overtime wages for so-called "obnoxious cargo," which represented considerable discomfort or safety hazard to the men: "cement, clay, hides, potash, sulphate of ammonia, sulphur [*sic*], caustic soda, ammunition, firecrackers, explosives, alfalfa feed, barb wire, copper wire and other cargo of a similar character not specifically mentioned herein."²³⁹ The occupational difference alone represents a 30 percent difference in wages among men on the same job, and more senior men would have enhanced opportunity to work the jobs that were better paid on account of the cargo or the time of day.

²³⁸ The standard deviation is the average distance from the mean value of all the values in a set of data. A small *s* indicates a tight clustering of the data about the mean; a large *s* indicates greater distance of most of the data from the mean. Assuming a normal distribution, the interpretation of "one standard deviation from the mean" is the value plus or minus the mean in which 68% of the values in the distribution fall. The range of wages within one standard deviation from the mean for Local 815 members is $\$776 \pm \306 , or between \$470 and \$1082. In other words, between two "typical" union longshoremen – both within one standard deviation of the mean – one's pay may be less than half that of the other. By contrast, the interquartile range (IQR) measures the difference between the midpoint between the minimum value and the median, and the midpoint between the median and the maximum value – the first and third quartiles, in other words. Unlike the standard deviation, IQR is robust to outliers and thus useful in cases where the data are not normally distributed. The similarity of the standard deviation and the IQR in this case implies that the high standard deviation is not merely an artifact of extreme values -- there really is wide dispersal about the center. Here, the two measures yield the same substantive interpretation.

²³⁹ Wisconsin State Historical Society (WSHS), International Longshoremen's Association Local 815 (ILA 815) Records, Folder 7, Box 13. 1939. Boat-39 Agreement.

Hourly rates for car gangs – who loaded and unloaded railroad cars departing and arriving by car ferries – were the same as the boat gang "on new freight which has not had a tonnage rate set...until the Union and Employer meet and set the said rate." For "boiler iron, bridge iron, furnaces, granite, heavy stone, linoleum, machinery, marble, slate, structural steel, and all other freight of unusual size and weight," the men were paid both the hourly wage rate and an additional tonnage rate.²⁴⁰ This system of payment seemed to yield better pay for the car men than the boat men; besides which the car ferries offered at least some employment year-round, since they merely crossed Lake Michigan rather than the narrow canals and rivers connecting the lakes.²⁴¹ Using Census data and draft registration cards it is possible to connect men's pay rates to employers. Among those who named their employer as Stephen DuPuy, a hiring agent for the railroad car ferries, the average annual income was \$1063.30 for an average of 34.6 weeks worked, compared to employees of W.A. Sellon and the GLTC whose average income was \$715.14 for 35.4 weeks. If these data are reasonably reflective of the general situation on the docks, general longshoremen in a car gang earned as much as 35 percent more in a week's work than their occupational counterparts in a boat gang.

It is difficult to determine the average differences in pay between the longshoremen and the marine warehousemen; data on wages, weeks worked, and employer are available for many of the men, but generally not specific occupations, and most employers that hired warehousemen also hired longshoremen.²⁴² Contracts indicate that longshoremen made the same or more than warehousemen by the hour, but at least some warehousemen had the opportunity to work year-round, earning higher

²⁴⁰ WSHS, ILA 815 Records, Folder 19, Box 13. 1939. Car Gang-39 Articles of Agreement.

²⁴¹ "The Port of Milwaukee: Historical, Descriptive, Prospective," Milwaukee Board of Harbor Commissioners, 1922.

²⁴² Census occupation notation is ambiguous and inconsistent. A few were specifically marked as warehousemen, but enumerators would also use "longshoreman," "dock worker," and "cargo handler," all of which in this context could be considered umbrella terms that include not just the loaders and unloaders but any non-managerial occupational category on the waterfront.

annual incomes. A clue to this effect is the comparison between the average wages of men employed by the Hansen Storage Company, a small warehouse operation, to those employed by Sellon in loading and unloading the GLTCS's package freighters. In 1939, the agreements that the union had with these two employers were essentially identical apart from a slight difference in the rate of overtime pay: at Sellon/GLTC, 85¢ for general longshoremen and warehousemen, and \$1.20 for winch and hoist men; at Hansen, 92¢ and \$1.27 for these categories respectively. But the average annual income at Hansen was \$1311.50, compared again to Sellon/GLTC's \$715.40. Rather than the difference in overtime rates, the fact that the Hansen men worked an average of 51.5 weeks rather than the 35.4 weeks of the Sellon/GLTC men accounts for most of the difference. Calculated as a weekly rate, the Hansen men made \$25.50 compared to Sellon/GLTC's \$20.21, but over the course of the year made nearly twice what their counterparts did. Still, the privilege of stable, year-long employment seemed to extend only to a minority even of the warehousemen. The man employed the longest at the Terminal Storage Company warehouse, for instance, worked only 42 weeks – longer than most of the general longshoremen, to be sure, but still with a considerable gap in employment. The average annual income at Terminal Storage was, correspondingly, a more modest \$814.30.²⁴³

Figure 5 describes the income frequency distribution among ILA 815 members for 1939 as reported by the 1940 Census. The highest paid individual (\$1820) was Aaron Toliver, indicating either that he worked *far* more hours than other longshoremen, a generous officer stipend in addition to his normal wages, or else that he was paid for other work he undertook in these years, discussed below; the lowest paid (\$150) was Joe Rekowski, who had only worked eight weeks that year. The distribution is

²⁴³ The members of 815 were acutely aware of this source of inequality and, in the early years, attempted to mitigate it; at a meeting in October 1940, the membership took a vote to the effect that "the longshoremen at the Nat. Terminal rotate all warehouse work" (ILA 815 Records, Volume 2, Box 1, 1940, October 22.). That such a decision is recorded only for the National Terminals Corporation and no other employer suggests that this policy was not necessarily consistent and may have been up to individual work gangs.

moderately skewed right (skewness = .68), indicating a concentration of men toward the lower end of the wage distribution and a small layer of higher-wage men. Toliver's earnings clearly stand out as an outlier; the next-highest paid man was Norman Haynes, making over \$300 less at \$1508. Haynes was a longshoreman employed by the Nugent Contracting Company and is listed as working 52 weeks – meaning that, although he was listed on the Census as a longshoreman, he must have either found another source of income in the winter months or succeeded in getting one of the year-round warehouse jobs organized by the local. The third best-paid – and the first who seems to have made his income entirely from longshoring during the shipping season, working only 36 weeks – was John Richards, whose employer is unknown but who earned \$1404.

The three best-paid members of ILA 815 – Aaron Toliver, Norman Haynes, and John Richards – were black men; Joe Rekowski, the worst paid, was white. While this certainly indicates no clear color line in wages characteristic of split labor markets, it also does exactly express an overall trend. Separating the membership into three groups – black, native-born white, and foreign-born white – the foreign-born emerge as the best paid segment: mean pay was \$849, with a median of \$800. The same figures for native-born whites were \$745.98 and \$750 respectively; blacks had a somewhat higher mean pay of \$758.68 but a lower median of \$700. The higher pay of the foreign-born is likely due to their greater accumulated seniority; the typical immigrant longshoreman was 48, a full decade older than the overall median age (the age profiles of black and native-born white workers were similar). Higher median pay among whites may be attributable to a bias toward white workers in the more stable

warehouse work.²⁴⁴ For both black workers and the foreign-born, significant differences between the mean and median indicate a few high-wage outliers in the within-group distributions. Figure 6 compares the income frequency distributions across the three segments.

Along these lines, then, wage inequality *across* categories was not especially large; inequality *within* these categories was much greater. As above, the standard deviation can be used to describe the dispersion within these categories. Like the average, the standard deviation is sensitive to outliers; like the median, the interquartile range is not. Using the median rather than the average as a measure of central tendency more accurately captures what was experienced as a *typical* pay for waterfront workers in the presence of outliers that skew the distribution; but for capturing the experience of wage inequality, it is appropriate to include the effect of the outliers. We are dealing with a small group of men in which the outliers are not merely nameless statistical abnormalities in a large dataset, but specific men known in the detail of their faces and their habits, the comments they made at the last meeting, their place in the seniority system, where they lived – in other words they entered *concretely* into the experience of wage inequality on the waterfront. On these grounds the standard deviation is still useful as a reflection of the inequality *felt* by longshoremen, even if it is less reliable as a statistical descriptor in the case of non-normal distributions. I therefore report both the standard deviation and the interquartile range.

²⁴⁴ Brzek's memory, as told to Chybowski, was that "only white members had steady jobs in warehouses and cement plants" in those years (Chybowski, 22). Various records together confirm at least two black warehousemen between 1938 and 1942, and at least four more by 1948; these latter four were at a single warehouse employer, named in a document written by Brzek himself (ILA 815 Record, Folder 7, Box 9, "Employees of Terminal Storage...", 1948) and all may have been working the houses earlier; missing data may hide more black workers at other warehouses. Possibly the operative phrase in Brzek's observation is "steady jobs," and these men worked in the warehouses on a more contingent basis, but better detail has proved impossible to obtain. The previous note above mentions an early attempt to equalize access to warehouse work by rotation, a policy which was apparently not pursued further in Brzek's administration – at least it is not mentioned again in the record.

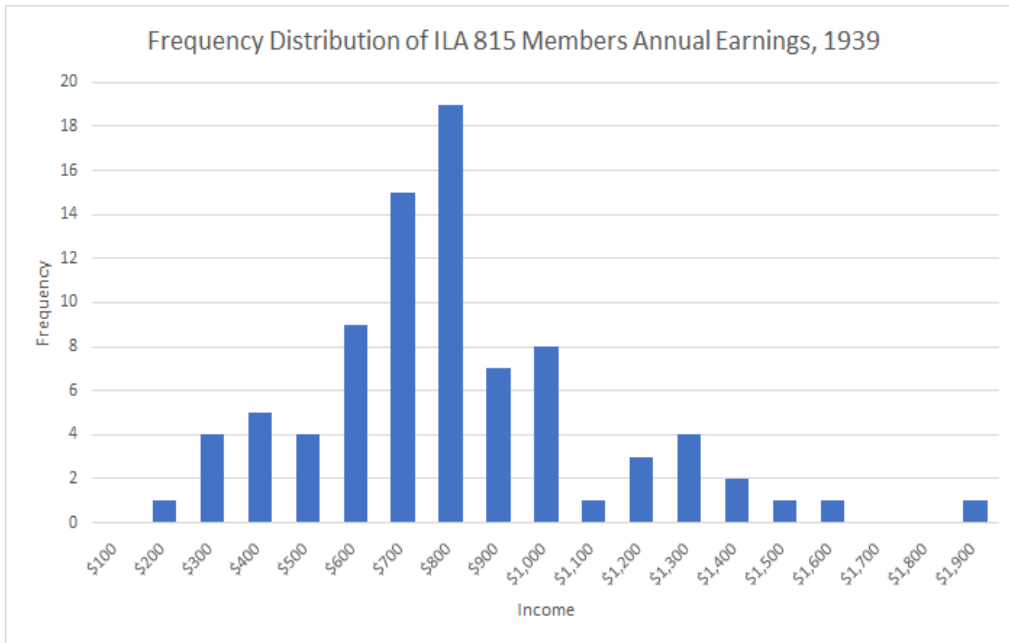


Figure 5. X-axis labels indicate bin upper bound.

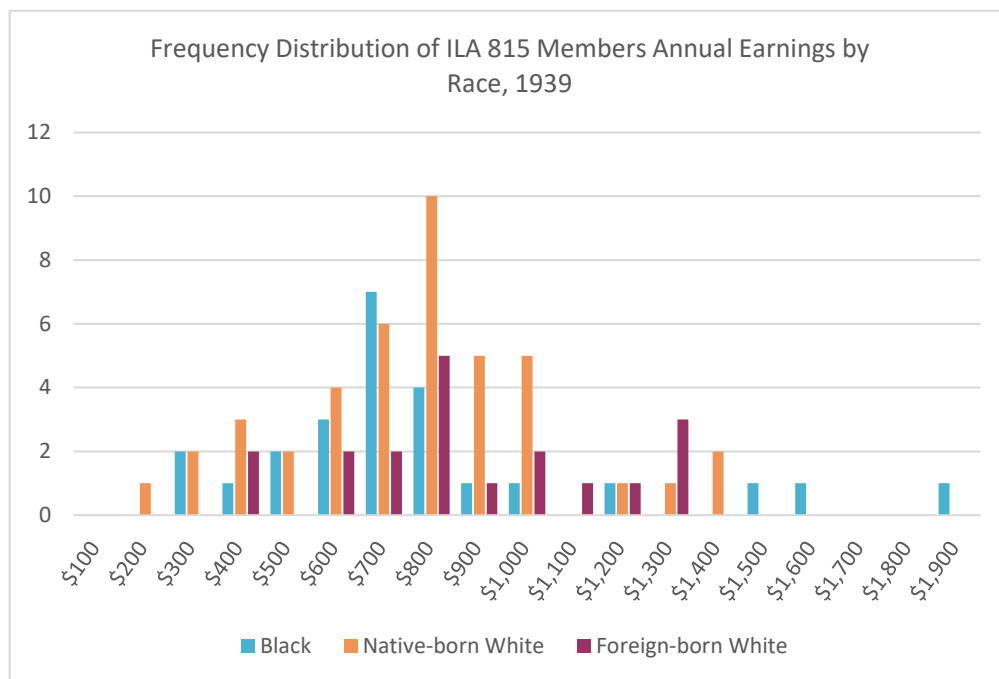


Figure 6. X-axis labels represent bin upper bound.

Calculating the standard deviations and IQRs of the three wage group distributions shows considerable internal inequality for all segments. For black workers, $s = \$372.74$ and $IQR = \$220$; for native-born whites, $s = \$274.47$ and $IQR = \$291.25$; for the foreign-born, $s = \$270.69$, $IQR = \$350$.²⁴⁵ By the standard deviation, black workers considered as a segment of the local exhibited the greatest degree of internal inequality, owing mainly to the relatively very high earnings of just a few men. By the IQR, robust to those high values, the black workers were the least unequal. At any rate, by either measure, there was considerably greater inequality within groups than between them.

These observations of ILA 815's wage patterns suggest a union troubled by considerable internal inequality. While some racial wage inequality is clearly discernible in the differences between the median values for black and white wages, wage inequality in 815 mainly cut across race: a handful of men, black and white, enjoyed relatively high pay while most others earned a whole third or more less, and many struggled to scrape together even a few hundred dollars. Almost certainly the most important source of inequality was the seniority system in the context of work scarcity. The number of weeks worked is the central correlate of earnings, and the most senior men had easiest access to the available work. Between men working similar hours, occupational differences in wages were also substantial.

The relevant economic literature would predict that wage inequality such as this tends to undermine workers' solidarity in general.²⁴⁶ Indeed, this condition may have been a contributing factor in the collapse of the radical leadership caucus of 815. A poorly paid and underemployed interracial rank-and-file had little incentive to mount any heroic defense of the left-wing leadership caucus on political grounds when the conservative group successfully cast itself as the only hope of keeping shippers' business at the port. Leaders and activists who could count on more stable employment could

²⁴⁵ The interpretations of the standard deviation and interquartile range are described in footnote 96 above.

²⁴⁶ See, e.g., Bowles, 29.

better afford a commitment to militancy – expressed in the aggressive posture toward employers, a prodigious tendency to use wildcat strikes to force immediate concessions, and a willingness to strike in sympathy with other workers – but the cost of doing so was too great for most of the local's members.

Wage inequality did not clearly map onto racial distinctions to produce a split labor market on the waterfront, and the response to the threat of decreased employment prospects did not take the shape of ethnic or racial exclusions of the sort that the split labor market theory would predict.²⁴⁷ While there was certainly a divide-and-conquer dynamic, it did not pit racially defined groups against each other as in Reich's model.²⁴⁸ Rather, the Great Lakes Transit Corporation's threat to exit the Port of Milwaukee stoked a conflict between low- and high-wage segments in the local, and between political factions – this latter division being the conflict that the GLTC *intended* to bring to a resolution favorable to the company.²⁴⁹

In this connection, I believe it is worth offering a final observation. Of twenty-four members identified as having served some official capacity in the local, I was able to find wage data for nine. The average annual earnings of this interracial group of nine men were higher than the average earnings of any of the three segments identified above, at \$998.11. No doubt this has to do with higher-than-average seniority among officers than the rank-and-file; in any case, however, it supports the hypothesis of a disconnect between officers and the rank-and-file, even while the former stayed on the job and

²⁴⁷ Bonacich, 553.

²⁴⁸ Reich, 536.

²⁴⁹ A later conflict in the local's postwar era also gives some more insight into employer tactics. The Terminal Storage Company, one of the waterfront's most intransigent, carried on a campaign of harassment in 1947 to get the local out of the shop. Seven men were discharged on dubious grounds, only one of whom (George Baker) was black, and the most egregiously charged (for theft of cargo) was white. The company had no complaints on other black workers; indeed, many of the men who avoided scrutiny were guilty of the same behaviors as the discharged men, mainly absenteeism. The company was clearly "playing favorites"; at least two of those discharged had been leading members in the local, and it may have been union activists the company was targeting. Again, there was a "divide-and-conquer" strategy here, but evidently not on racial lines (ILA 815 Records, Folder 7, Box 9, "History of Terminal Storage," 1947).

were not yet a separate bureaucratic layer. As men with greater seniority on average, some had been more willing and able to tolerate the risks of militant strategies than the membership at large.

3. Solidarity and the foreign-born

Some histories of interracial solidarity in the labor movement emphasize the racial composition of the workforce at the time of union organization as being key to the explanation. In Jones's study of Southern lumber mills, he explains the difference across three cases at least partially in such terms: where black and white workers made up similar proportions of the unskilled workforce, genuine interracial solidarity was more common; where blacks predominated, they built and led unions, white resistance notwithstanding; where whites predominated, there was biracial unionism with blacks in segregated locals or auxiliaries thoroughly subordinated to the white organizations.²⁵⁰ It goes without saying that such demographic characteristics and the particulars of the distribution of workers across occupations does not explain everything; nevertheless, such features are made relevant by the quite basic mechanisms at play (e.g., half of the workforce is considerably more difficult to exclude by the other half, than a tenth by the other nine-tenths). Yet, in this case, white workers were a supermajority of the membership at the time the union formed, but it was genuinely interracial, with multiple black officials from the start.

In some contexts, as on the Philadelphia waterfront, a large proportion of immigrant workers can help to explain the election of black leadership in majority-white unions in workplaces where there are few native-born white workers.²⁵¹ Where the only native-born workers – who suffer no language barrier in the articulation of grievances and interests to management – are black, white immigrant

²⁵⁰ Jones, 151-52.

²⁵¹ Cole, 53.

workers may find it sensible to choose them as stewards. There is insufficient evidence to determine whether or to what extent this dynamic was present in 815, but it is conceivable that it was factor in the formation of a layer of black rank-and-file leadership at the level of the work gang in the 1920s, when black workers first began working on the docks in considerable numbers.

The possibility calls for a closer look at the foreign-born segment. It is difficult to establish a clear social profile of these men on account of scarce data, but some clear patterns emerge. Of fifty-five confirmed foreign-born men, nineteen (35 percent) hailed from Poland, nine (16 percent) from Russia, and eight each (15 percent) from Lithuania and Sweden.²⁵² The remainder came in the ones-and-twos from throughout Europe: two each from Germany, Finland, and Norway; one each from Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Italy, and Yugoslavia. The waterfront thus still exhibited some of the Eastern European and especially Polish imprint it had more obviously borne in the Twenties as these groups came to replace the Irish and Scandinavian men of the prior generation.

An important note about these figures is that a person's national origin in the 1940 Census was defined in terms of the nation their birthplace belonged to as of January 1, 1937. This means that, of ten Polish workers whose year of arrival is known, only one left a sovereign Poland; the rest, arriving prior to the outbreak of World War I, came from a Polish section of the Russian Empire, the Kingdom of Prussia, or Austria-Hungary. I simply do not know if or to what extent such distinctions are relevant to the question of US working-class formation – I do not know what political lives these men lived in their homelands, what crises they confronted and endured, what experiences of solidarity and division they had already had when they arrived. It would seem to me a full account of US working-class formation in

²⁵² I exclude here one anglophone Canadian.

the 20th century would integrate the social history of Eastern Europe's crises that, after all, supplied the country with the peasants and craftsmen out of whom it would construct an industrial proletariat.²⁵³

It is tempting to write off such questions in light of the fact that, by the time period captured in this study, the process of "becoming white" was already far advanced; the peoples of Eastern Europe and their children were defined quite unproblematically as white by the Thirties compared to a generation or two before, and they suffered none of the major formal racial exclusions of the period associated with, say, the new Federal Housing Administration, nor the exclusions, official and informal, of Jim Crow's northern variant. Moreover, it may be reasonable to make such an omission in any summary history of class formation across long time periods within the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, since a significant feature of the American scene is the general weakness of independent ethnic and national associations, the failure to preserve the linguistic and other traditions of the ancestors of Americans of European descent, and the extent to which those ethnic institutions that remained often mobilized their respective constituents *qua* whites in opposition to black struggle.²⁵⁴ Yet such an omission is less justified when it comes to the analysis of specific cases within narrow temporal bounds; whatever is meaningful in the experience and traditions of the migrant generations may be quickly lost to their descendants, but not necessarily so to themselves. One runs the risk, in short, of committing oneself to a kind of racial teleology in taking the general *conclusions* of "whiteness studies" as *assumptions* in the analysis of a given case.

²⁵³ An excellent study of class formation in the United States highly sensitive to the specific community characteristics of the foreign-born is Peter Friedlander's *Emergence of a UAW Local, 1936-1939* (1975).

²⁵⁴ See, e.g., Stephen Steinberg, *The Ethnic Myth: Race, Ethnicity, and Class in America*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 44-74; and John T. McGreevey, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North* (Chicago: UC Press, 1996), 29-54. For this phenomenon in Milwaukee, see Patrick D. Jones, *The Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 86-87; 99-100; 229-32.

In that spirit I offer some impressions on the foreign-born workers of ILA 815.²⁵⁵ Of the total fifty-six foreign-born men I have identified, I could find an arrival year for only nineteen. Of course, between the onset of World War I, quickly followed by a nativist surge culminating in sharp immigration restrictions and the passage of the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act, followed in turn by the Great Depression a few years later, the flow of migration had been reduced considerably for practically a generation by the time Local 815 reemerged on the scene in 1934. Correspondingly, all but two of the nineteen arrived in 1913 or earlier. At the same time, these men belonged to second and third waves of Eastern European migrants; all but one arrived in 1900 or later. Most migrated in their young adulthood, but three arrived at the age of two or three, with little direct memory of their homelands but with strong ethnic attachments through their parents. Compared to the other two segments, a few features stand out immediately. As already mentioned, the foreign-born had the highest wages by a narrow margin of the three groups but were considerably older on average. They were much less likely to be married, with fewer than 20 percent of the foreign-born living with family, compared with 57 percent of native-born whites and 42 percent of blacks. They were also far more likely to live in the Community House shelter or boarding houses: seventeen (30 percent), all but one from Eastern Europe, lived in such circumstances, compared to 6.5 percent of native-born whites and 8.5 percent of blacks. A residential map of the longshoremen (Figures 7 and 8 in the next section) shows that the foreign-born, while not as concentrated as their black counterparts, clustered into the southwestern corner of the confluence of Milwaukee's three rivers, under the smoke and dust of the city's industrial center. Given these general features it seems plausible that the foreign-born men were, taken as a group, disadvantaged relative to

²⁵⁵ NB: The exclusion of first-generation immigrants – that is, those born in the United States whose parents are immigrants – might well be seen as a partial concession to the arguments of whiteness studies. I assume, in other words, that whatever ethnic markers are carried by the first native-born generation simply do not count as signifiers of meaningful difference from whiteness in their social contexts.

their native-born counterparts. Poles were the largest group, and they had not long before been the predominating group on the docks. The Polish men of the Depression-era waterfront found a well-organized and established Polish community when they arrived in Milwaukee some twenty years before the revival of Local 815. The Polish quickly became the largest migrant group in the city after the Germans, with three major Polish settlements within the city by the 1870s. This community distinguished itself by a series of firsts for American *Polonia*: the first urban Polish church in the US in St. Stanislaus (appropriately, only a few blocks from the waterfront on the Kinnickinnick River); the first Polish Catholic School in 1868; the first Polish military company with the formation of the Kosciuszko Guard in 1874; and the first major Polish daily, the *Kuryer Polski*, founded in 1888. They also became influential politically, forming a major constituency of the Milwaukee Democratic Party and taking part in municipal politics.²⁵⁶ In 1895, the *Kuryer Polski's* founding editor protested that no group in Milwaukee suffered more prejudice than the Poles. Hyperbole notwithstanding, recent history had made the Polish the targets of bad press and worse. The popular anti-Catholicism of that era did no favors to a community with a tenacious attachment to the Church, and the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, when it took note of the city's Poles, characterized them as backward, insular, and clannish. The density of Polish workers in low-paid and "unskilled" occupations also meant they were stamped with the stigma of class. Worse yet, Polish workers were also associated in the public mind with the most violent outbreak of class struggle in the city's history, when only hours after the bomb went off in Chicago's Haymarket Affair, the Wisconsin governor called out militias to quash the movement for the eight-hour day in Milwaukee. Over a thousand workers from the Milwaukee Iron Company's Bay View rolling mills, virtually all Polish, had met at St. Stanislaus to march to shut down the plant; the militia fired into the

²⁵⁶ John Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee* (Milwaukee: Milwaukee County Historical Society Press, 2006).

marching crowd of strikers, killing at least five in the Bay View Massacre of 1886.²⁵⁷ The repression both revealed and deepened splits in the Polish community – the previous day the same strikers had been forced to confront none other than "their own" Kosciuszko Guard – and probably helped to ward off Poles from political radicalism, which would remain largely the preserve of the Germans and Yankees of the Socialist Party.²⁵⁸ Still another generation would pass before the Polish ILA men arrived, having missed all the action in the establishment, development, repression, and rehabilitation of the city's *Polonia*, by which time most were already native-born, English-speaking Polish-Americans.

Three of the five foreign-born men to hold any official capacity in the local were Polish, and two of them would have been more like their native-born counterparts, having arrived as small children: Stanley Brzek in 1909 at about two years old; and Bruno Radaj in 1902 at three. Stanley Brzek was the older brother of John Brzek, who was born in Milwaukee shortly after his family's arrival and who would come to lead the charge for the expulsions of the leftists. Stanley had made the attempt earlier, running for president against Aaron Toliver in 1936 but coming in a distant second. Radaj, for his part, was a major figure in the leadership, variously serving as president, business agent, and other capacities in the union's earliest years, indicating he was likely one of its original organizers and advocates. He continued to serve in leadership during and after the 1942 expulsions, before being forced to resign his position as

²⁵⁷ Gurda, PAGE.

²⁵⁸ Gurda, PAGE; Beck, PAGE. The hypothesis that the Bay View Massacre contributed to a long-term general disengagement with radical politics by the city's Polish community comes from Fred Blair (OHAL interview). A 1902 issue of the Socialist publication *Social Democratic Herald* virtually writes off the Polish. About incumbent Democratic mayor David Rose they wrote: "On the other hand, the Democratic politicians for years have made a specialty of drumming up votes among the masses. The Democratic politician nowadays is almost invariably a reformer by profession, but it is almost as much a matter of course that he is a crook.... He is sure of the Polish vote – the Polish priests are all on his side" ("Our Issue in This Election," *Social Democratic Herald*, March 15, 1902.). In fact, the Polish are the only ethnic group mentioned specifically as being in the pocket. Careful research on Polish electoral behavior in Milwaukee forces a caveat: Polish support for Socialists increased in the Socialist Party's heyday, especially among South Side Poles who delivered majority support to Emil Seidel in 1914 and Dan Hoan in 1916. But Polish support for the Socialist Party trailed off again when the party publicly opposed World War I, which many Poles considered tantamount to opposing Polish independence (Pienkos 1978, 188-89).

business agent in 1943.²⁵⁹ Charles Kress immigrated in 1907 at the age of about 25, and appears to have served briefly on the executive board in 1937-38, almost certainly as a trustee; he was probably also a steward at the National Terminals Company.

Besides these three, the only other two foreign-born men to hold office were both Swedes: George Carlson served as a marshal in 1940 and 41; Sven Winkler occupied an at-large seat on the executive board around the same time. Nothing else is known about them other than that George Carlson hailed, along with his brother Alvin who was also a longshoreman, from the obscure municipality of Backefors in Sweden, and he was employed by contractor Stephen DuPuy; and that Winkler, employed at Hansen Storage, was probably a warehouseman.

Studies on the development of Russian, Lithuanian, and Scandinavian communities in Milwaukee are much more difficult to come by than scholarship on Milwaukee Poles; these were all smaller groups who left less of an impression on the city. The Russian and Lithuanian men of Local 815 were highly concentrated at the Community House homeless shelter and the boarding houses. None of them, nor any other of the foreign-born men, served in any official role for the union; none were among the left-wing activists expelled in 1942.

The underrepresentation of the foreign-born among the leadership is consistent with the notion that they would tend to defer to native-born leadership, black or white. While linguistic barriers may have been a factor, most of the immigrant longshoremen would have already been in the country for two decades or more by the time Local 815 was resurrected. A more straightforward interpretation may simply be that these men were older and more content to leave the tasks of organization to their younger and more energetic counterparts; as long as the principle of seniority was respected, perhaps

²⁵⁹ Chybowski, 68.

they did not concern themselves much about the local's leadership or involve themselves in its political conflicts. In the context of the Depression especially, they may have calculated that an old immigrant would have a harder time finding another job than a younger man who spoke with no accent, and that it was best, then, to stay under the radar. By the same token, however, when it came to a contest between leadership factions in which the availability of work seemed seriously on the table, and where employers openly threatened to eliminate jobs conditional on the outcome, this segment of the membership could be relied upon to take the safe bet.

Finally, however, this interpretation is troubled by a decision taken by the membership in August of 1938 that all new officers of the local "must show citizenship papers." Of the fifteen foreign-born men for whom I was able to obtain naturalization petitions or other documents related to citizenship, only five apparently had become citizens or begun the process of gaining citizenship by that year. By 1941, this would rise to a majority; by 1947, all were citizens. It is not clear how seriously this decision was enforced; Bruno Radaj, who served on the executive board continuously from 1935 to 1943, apparently did not become a citizen until 1941. At any rate, it would seem that such a decision would have a demotivating, and perhaps even chilling, effect on any foreign-born worker who might have considered running for office or even becoming more actively involved in the local's affairs; still, it remains significant that they apparently sometimes opted for black stewards rather than native-born whites. In the end, the evidence for any linguistic dynamic on the docks that can help to explain the early success of interracial unity, like that identified by Cole for the Philadelphia waterfront, remains highly tentative.

4. Neighborhoods and demographics

One straightforward demographic explanation for interracial solidarity found in the historical literature has to do simply with the concentration of black workers in the workplace. As mentioned above, Jones suggests that the key variable at work in determining the racial practices of locals is the racial composition of the workforce at the time the unionization effort began: where the workforce was nearly evenly split between black and white workers, genuine interracial unionism – as opposed to purely nominal inclusion on a subordinate basis – emerged.²⁶⁰ Its motivation was reminiscent of the same logic that led the ILA, which was not at all advanced on the "race question," to have among the largest proportions of black members: white workers could not be undercut by black workers when they were inside the union, and the former were not likely to be successful in simply excluding the latter on a permanent basis.

The proportion of black longshoremen in the ILA 815 was lower than half, but far higher than their proportion in the city: 34 percent as opposed to 1.5 percent. The reason for this high concentration was simple enough – it was undesirable work, and labor market discrimination in Milwaukee tended to drive black workers toward waterfront employment, and away from better jobs in the city's manufacturing sector. It was probably the case that this was a large enough proportion to preclude exclusion on the waterfront. But if the earliest minutes of the organization are any indication, black longshoremen had not simply been present for, but central to the unionization effort, winning leadership positions right out of the gate. This indicates a deeper culture of interracial solidarity than is captured by mere demographic mechanisms.

²⁶⁰ Jones, 151-52.

Joseph Gerteis's study of interracial solidarity in the labor movement of the late 19th century South is unusual and compelling because he emphasizes the importance of broader political dynamics rooted in neighborhoods, not just workplaces, in the explanation of interracial class projects. He compares two Southern cities: Richmond, Virginia, where the racial geography underpinned the possibility of independent black political and civic expression in municipal politics and where a vibrant interracial movement of the Knights of Labor took root; and Atlanta, where it did not. At issue is whether residential patterns and ward boundaries intersected in such a way as to put the city's black community in a position to successfully compete on the municipal level, producing black ward leaders and city councilors, and the ecosystem of organizations necessary to create them. The opportunity to contest for office is a spur to organization: with political power reasonably within reach, leaders and activists form and sustain successful associations designed for the purpose of attaining it.²⁶¹ When class struggle intensified in this context, white labor was disciplined by the presence of an already well-organized and connected black working class, and were convinced of the latter's "civic virtue"; at the very least, cooperation seemed a less costly route than exclusion. So goes the story in Richmond. But the black community in Atlanta in the same years was more geographically fragmented, and its political power thereby diluted. There was not the same development of a layer of black working-class leadership with whom white labor leaders and activists would have to reckon.²⁶²

More generally, this argument gestures in the same direction as scholars who emphasize the bounded social environment of the worksite as an enabling condition for the emergence of solidarity across racial lines among workers. In this connection historians have noted a key rhetorical strategy by

²⁶¹ There is a clear affinity here with the Social Movement Studies concept of the *political opportunity structure* (see Meyer 2004 for a review).

²⁶² Gerteis, 12-13.

Southern labor leaders: insist on the necessity and righteousness of "industrial equality" and of unions' struggle to realize and promote it, while carefully distinguishing this sort of equality from "social equality". With work life so clearly separated in space and time from private life, it was conceivable that on-the-job solidarity did not pose a fundamental threat to the overarching racial order and its basic proscriptions. The men-only environment of the workplace, for that matter, made solidarity more attainable by minimizing the tensions arising from whites' fears of sexual "commingling," and which were unavoidable in the context of the integrated neighborhood. Labor organizers in the Southern mining and longshoring industries certainly deployed such careful "industrial equality" rhetoric in their efforts to gain acceptance and avoid censure.²⁶³ Segregated residential patterns, along these lines, may have contributed to interracial solidarity at the worksite, because they eased white anxieties about "race-mixing".

Yet other historical examples point in the other direction. Black and white steelworkers in Gary, Indiana lived in the integrated Patch neighborhood, which was part of the basis for the keeping of the peace in that city when breathtaking violence was underway in nearby Chicago in 1919, and underpinned extraordinary demonstrations of interracial solidarity during the Great Steel Strike of the same year, after which Gary's leadership aggressively moved to segregate the population.²⁶⁴ Black and white workers also lived and worked in close quarters around Memphis's Fort Pickering neighborhood, which was a site of routine interracial contact and cooperation that made it ground-zero for interracial

²⁶³ E.g., Letwin, 82, 123, 143, 148-49, 154-55, 188; Spero and Harris, 65-71. It is almost hard to believe that the term "social equality" once was used to arouse fear and outrage among whites – it strikes a present-day reader as somewhat vague, seeming to pack none of the rhetorical punch that other phrases used by white supremacist ideologists and agitators did. But the vagueness made it useful for talking about many things at once: denouncing labor's agitators as proponents of "social equality" could undermine unionization drives by tapping into fears of interracial sex. See, e.g., Eileen Boris, "'You Wouldn't Want One of 'Em Dancing With Your Wife': Racialized Bodies on the Job in World War II," *American Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (1998): 79, 86-87, 97-98.

²⁶⁴ Ruth Needleman, *Black Freedom Fighters in Steel* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 13, 24.

CIO organizing in Memphis.²⁶⁵ And, of course, Southern miners – whose early adoption of an 'affirmative action' policy for hiring black organizers became *the* blueprint of proactive interracial unionism – may have divided themselves and their families into racially-defined sections within the mining camp and established racially-segregated institutions, but these were nevertheless not quite segregated communities in the same way urban neighborhoods were (and are).²⁶⁶ It is difficult to draw any direct link between neighborhood conditions and the solidarity found on the Milwaukee waterfront, but two observations are noteworthy. First, while there had not yet developed a clear ghettoized black community by the Thirties, at least in the sense of a segregated community in which nearly all residents are black, the process of ghetto formation was definitely in motion. Black Milwaukeeans were absolutely concentrated, indeed increasingly so compared to earlier decades, in what came to be known as the Inner Core, falling mainly within the Sixth Ward. This concentration was the basis of efforts in the Thirties to elect a black alderman for the Sixth, mentioned in the previous chapter. Yet, unlike Southern cities and unlike major destination cities in the North for Southern black migrants such as Detroit and Chicago, Milwaukee still had a very small black population overall (less than 1.5 percent of the city population), and still represented a numerical minority even in the neighborhood in which they were concentrated: Census data shows that of 6,285 dwellings recorded in the Sixth ward in 1940, 4,308 were white occupied and 1,977 non-white occupied.²⁶⁷

Gerteis' case depends on the calculation and comparison of various indices of segregation and isolation for Richmond and Atlanta. Each had quite different patterns of segregation, but the upshot is that Richmond's pattern created a highly coherent (in spatial and therefore social terms) black

²⁶⁵ Honey, 58.

²⁶⁶ Boswell et al., *op cit.*; Letwin, 35.

²⁶⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, 16th Census of the United States, 1940. Housing. Supplement to the First Series. Housing Bulletin for Wisconsin. Milwaukee. Block Statistics. Washington, D.C.: U.S. G.P.O., 1942.

community in Jackson Ward, while Atlanta's black residents were highly segregated at the block level but spread across many wards in the city. The pattern of segregation in Milwaukee in 1940 is different to both, of course: the very small black population meant that there was no place in the city aside from a few Census tracts (only 20, 29, 30) in which black residents comprised a majority – there was, in other words, nothing quite like Jackson Ward for Milwaukee. But like in Richmond, and unlike Atlanta, Milwaukee's black population was very highly concentrated: 97 percent lived in the contiguous area between 3rd and 12th Streets, bounded on the north and south by Wright and Kilbourne Streets. This area is coextensive with Census tracts 19, 20, 21, 29, 30, 35, and 36; the map in Figure 7 below indicates these tracts. Most of this area fell inside the Sixth Ward, where 82.9 percent of Milwaukee's black residents lived.²⁶⁸

Key to the emergence of a strong black civil society in Richmond was not merely the extent of segregation, but the extent of isolation from white society. Richmond was highly segregated at the block level as measured by the dissimilarity index (D); but high D values may reflect either concentrated or dispersed patterns of segregation. Because the successful construction of an independent black organizational ecosystem rests on relative freedom from white control and influence and the opportunity to directly contest for power, some other measure capturing isolation is required. The black-white interaction index (E_{bw}), rather than a measure of segregation per se, is a measure of exposure (or isolation) and is meant to capture one aspect about the day-to-day lived experience of segregation: the extent to which people of different racial groups are likely to encounter one another. Jackson Ward's $D = 64$, but E_{bw} for Jackson Ward was only 18 – meaning that for every hundred people met by the average black Jackson Ward resident, only about eighteen were white.

²⁶⁸ Trotter, 176.

Milwaukee's patterns of segregation are consistent with its very active, but politically fragmented, black community in the Depression era. By 1940 a very clear pattern of segregation was already taking shape: $D = 87.2$, indicating a deeply segregated society.²⁶⁹ Segregation within the Sixth Ward was comparable to Richmond's Jackson Ward, at $D = 67.5$. But the black residents of the Sixth were considerably less isolated than their Richmond counterparts in an earlier generation: $E_{bw} = 33.7$.²⁷⁰ This certainly indicated greater isolation than in the city as a whole (where $E_{bw} = 56$) but much more interracial interaction than in Jackson Ward, and indeed more than most of the Atlanta wards Gerteis calculated, where the lack of a geographically concentrated black community contributed to the failure of interracial solidarity in the labor movement. Gerteis does not posit a specific limit above which the presumed effect no longer holds, but this must clear it. Black Milwaukee in the Thirties is thus something of a mixed case: there is considerable concentration, but that did not yet imply a high degree of isolation. Ultimately the small overall size of the city's black population produced this result.

The pattern of black political activity seems to reflect this as well. There can be no doubt that residential patterns predicated independent black politics in the Sixth Ward, but activists failed to cohere around a single project and leadership remained factionalized. The organization of the Federated Council of Clubs for the election of a black alderman in 1932, spearheaded by UNIA, is mentioned in the previous chapter; the reason for the failure of this effort was that divisions of class and culture split the black community, and there was clearly dissension on the question of the desirability or wisdom of such a direct approach at that time. With the FCC's candidate going ahead, however, prominent middle-class leaders in the community such as J. Anthony Josey, publisher of the *Wisconsin Weekly Blade*, opposing

²⁶⁹ This calculation comes from Trotter with city wards as the unit (176). The dissimilarity index falls between 0 and 100. The index can be interpreted as the percentage of the population who would have to move to another ward in order to achieve a uniform distribution across wards.

²⁷⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, *op cit.*

both UNIA and insurgent factions among black Republicans, felt they had to field their own candidate. The split vote put both out of the running, neither making it past the primary election. In fact, Josey and his paper had openly supported the incumbent Samuel Soref, and the putting forward of a second black candidate may have been principally a tactic to ensure that he would *not* face a black candidate who could purport to speak for the whole community. Together the two black candidates won 22.3 percent of the Sixth Ward vote, well ahead of the second-place candidate's 17 percent – but that did no good split across two candidates. In the general election, there was evidence of yet another division – those who, in the absence of a black candidate, stuck with the Nonpartisan Soref, and those who backed the Socialist challenger Schultz.²⁷¹

In his study, Trotter speculated that the ascent of a black candidate to the main election would have solidified white unity in the ward; indeed, this was probably Josey's concern at the time.²⁷² Implicit in that speculation is an interesting specification to Gerteis's central claim: the rise of black ward politics is conducive to interracial class solidarity *if it succeeds* in electing a black official – otherwise it may only steel white resolve to prevent its emergence. Yet, at least for the moment, the failure to produce any black elected officials did not seem to seriously drag down the prospects for solidarity in the labor movement: black labor leaders emerged not only on the waterfront but also in the meatpacking industry (LeRoy Johnson) and the tanneries (Joe Ellis), and many others in lower offices. At any rate, we cannot know for sure what would have happened in the counterfactual where the FCC's candidate stood for the general aldermanic election in 1932. Ward-level black political activism continued to find expression throughout the decade, and with the rise of the New Deal coalition would tend toward engagement with the Democratic Party, although the peculiarities of Wisconsin and Milwaukee politics – the

²⁷¹ Trotter, 135.

²⁷² *Ibid.*

conservatism of the state's Democrats, the hegemony exercised by independent and Republican Progressives over liberal forces, the relative viability of third-party experiments – meant there would still be considerable fragmentation. The longshoremen's own Aaron Toliver, for instance, was a candidate for committeeman of the Progressive Party for the Sixth Ward in 1938, alongside prominent former Garveyite and Socialist Ernest Bland; the same year, union construction worker Jess Brown ran for the same role for the Democratic Party, and printer Martin Wright in the Republican Party.²⁷³

Given its small size, the prospects for independent black organization in Milwaukee were surely improved by the community's geographical concentration, even if it also prevented it from attaining the prestige of elected office – so important to Gerteis's account – in the city for the time being. Two other elements of the historical context seem key for understanding the rise of interracial projects in the city in the Thirties. The first is the importance of the absence of the determinants of conflict, discussed in chapter 2 and in section 2 above: the insignificance of split labor market conditions, in part on account of the small size of the black population; and as far as the longshoremen are concerned, the strongly overlapping wage distributions do not indicate a systematic difference in the cost of labor for the same work. The second is the extraordinary nature of the era: the total crisis, the necessarily more inclusive industrial organizing efforts, and the identity-forming reactions by state relief institutions cultivated an ethos of social solidarity that destabilized the prevailing common sense about various inequalities and hierarchies that once seemed natural or immutable. The history of the immediate postwar era is, unfortunately, one in which that common sense is reasserted, and in Milwaukee would represent also a vicious intensification of racial division.

²⁷³ "Party Committeemen," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 12, 1938, p. 18.

As for the longshoremen in the Thirties, their own residential patterns likewise reflected the sharpening racial segregation in the city. The small size of the black community at large and their hyper-concentration on the city's near north side meant that many black longshoremen were also neighbors, and Census records confirm that some were also living together. If Gerteis's arguments scale down to more micro-levels, then it is not hard to imagine significant opportunities for black longshoremen to caucus off the clock. The men may have worked in integrated gangs, but the walk home was largely a segregated one. Figures 7 and 8 below show the residences of the members of ILA 815, with tract and ward boundaries respectively.

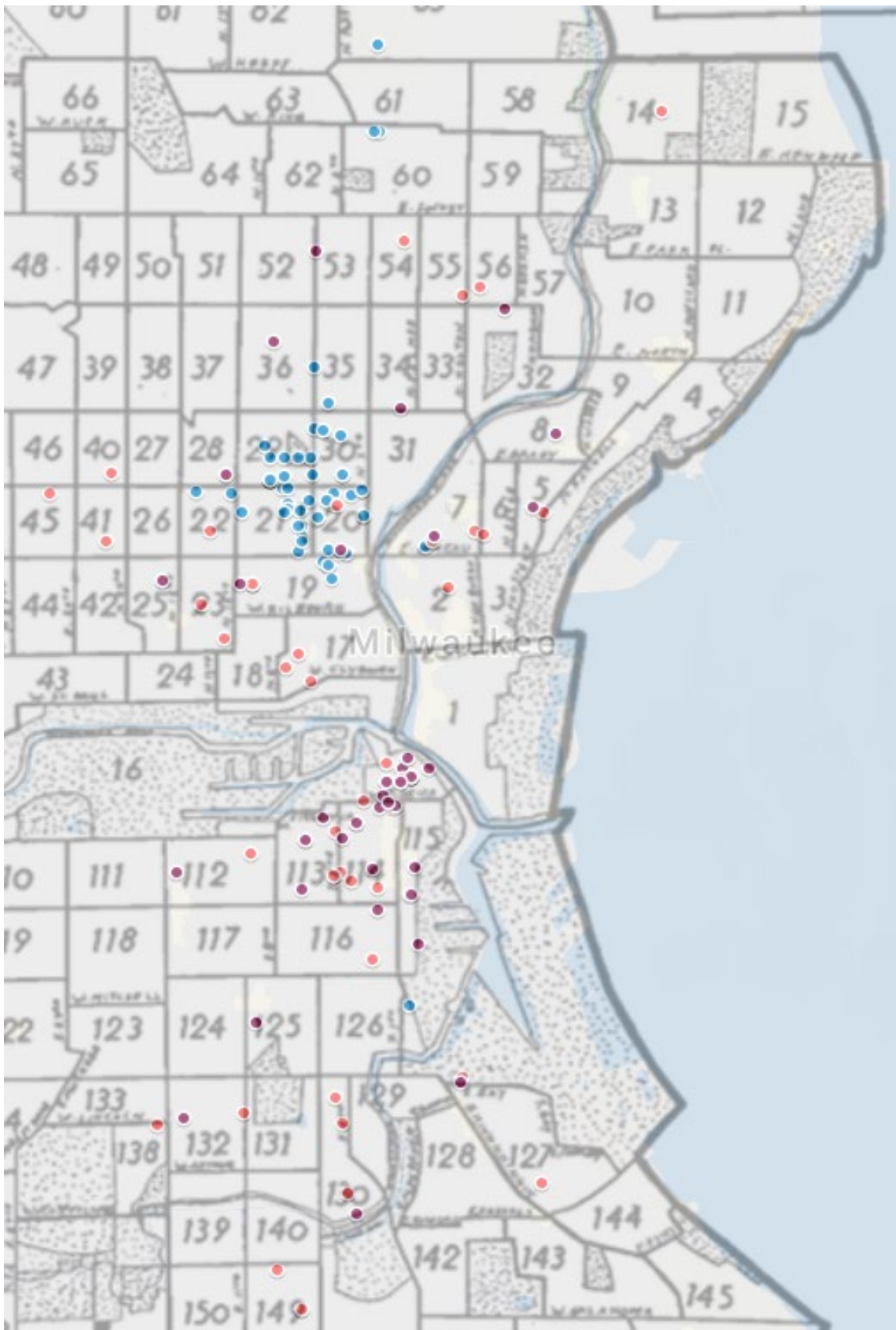


Figure 5. Census tracts indicated. Legend: Blue = black; orange = native-born white; maroon = foreign-born.

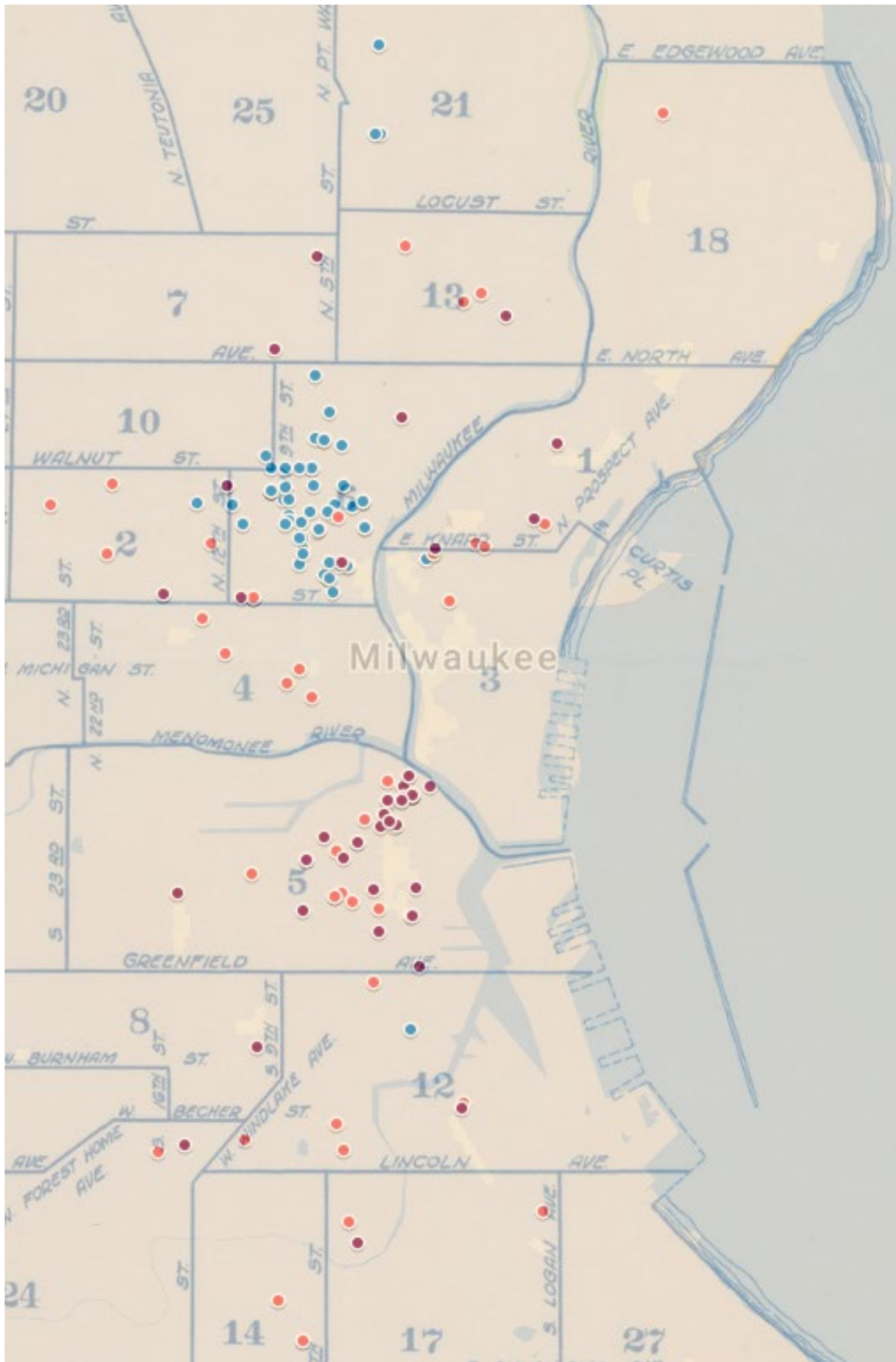


Figure 6. Ward boundaries indicated. Blue = black; orange = native-born white; maroon = foreign-born.

5. Work history and background

At least two accounts of maritime unionism note the importance of the backgrounds of union members with respect to previous work experience in explaining the characteristics of their organizations.

Kimeldorf argues that one reason for the West Coast's radicalism was the much more porous boundary between seamen and longshoremen than in the East; in part, the radicalism of the West Coast longshoremen was an import from seamen's unionism. The situation on the East Coast was otherwise – very few of the longshoremen had ever served on a freighter's crew.²⁷⁴ On unionism in the Great Lakes, Larowe does not indicate to what extent the ships and the docks had overlapping personnel, but he does note that, unlike their counterparts on the open sea, lake seamen tended to be men of a more conservative ilk. The Great Lakes were a sealed system, its ships did not go out to sea, and their voyages were shorter. Their crews were made up not of adventurous wanderers but rural and small-town men, whose worlds were much smaller, their strangest and most exotic encounters being, perhaps, with Quebecois. It follows that, like their East Coast counterparts, the longshoremen of the Great Lakes would not be exposed by the seamen to radical new ideas; and to the extent that they shared the social and work backgrounds of the lake seamen, then they too would tend toward conservative unionism.²⁷⁵

I do not test these claims directly, but here run with the basic insight that understanding something about the background of the men involved can tell us something about the character of the local. With genealogical and newspaper records, it has been possible to gain some insights into the lives and characteristics of the men of the ILA 815, especially the local's two "main characters," Aaron Toliver and John Brzek. These two men can be taken as representing the two competing political projects within the local, and their comparison (see Chapter 5) indicates the contradictory tendencies at work in 815

²⁷⁴ Kimeldorf, *Reds*, 20-27; 37-46.

²⁷⁵ Larowe, 6-7.

and indeed in the whole history of waterfront unionism. Otherwise, material on the longshoremen is unsurprisingly quite sparse, and at any rate it is impossible to draw any firm conclusions on the ideological proclivities of the men based on shreds of information about their previous class experiences. Nevertheless, it retains some impressionistic value.

Most of the black men in the local for whom there is data prior to their arrival in Wisconsin came from rural backgrounds, and work on the waterfront probably conferred better wages than they had earned as farm laborers. But some of these men had prior experience in other Milwaukee industries and were probably among the first to be laid off after the economy collapsed. For these men, there can be little doubt that longshoring was a step back down; at the same time, experience in industry may have cultivated a disposition favorable toward unionism in general, and the industrial form that the revived ILA 815 took in particular. The other jobs these men had were also bull work – typically the worst jobs at the lowest pay in their respective industries, usually basic steel or other metalwork – but they would have at least provided steady work and probably at better pay than the waterfront. Longshoremen Earl Bess and Otis Reed both worked as foundrymen in Milwaukee, Reed as early as 1920, before finally working the docks. Cliff Crowell of Alabama was working as a chainman at a Milwaukee steel plant in 1930 before becoming a longshoreman. Willie Lamays, born in Buchanan, Texas but raised in Lonoke, Arkansas, worked as a fireman on a stationary engine in 1930. While it is possible that some of these men chose the waterfront, preferring the greater control over their work time and the fresh air to brutal industrial discipline and the toxic fumes at the cost of lost wages, it seems more plausible that a combination of economic crisis and discriminatory firing pushed them down the rungs of the job market ladder.

Some of the black longshoremen arrived in Milwaukee already members of the industrial proletariat, through their own work history or that of their families. This is likely the case for the handful

born in urban areas – George Baker from Philadelphia, Charles Richards from Cincinnati, Leon Woods from Kansas City, and some others. Brothers Clinton and William Brown of Corydon, Kentucky were sons of a tenant farmer, but their brothers were miners; Clinton, fourteen years William's elder, might himself have worked a stint in the mine before the two found their way to Milwaukee. William became a leader in the local, serving as a car gang steward. Hobart Wharton also served as a senior steward for the longshoremen who worked at the Nugent company after having worked as a foundryman in Buffalo. Willie Hemmitt, who served on the executive board from the early years until at least the early Sixties, had been a sawmill worker in Arkansas and East Texas in his youth. Husie Colbert, a member of the local's founding executive board, moved from Virginia to Ohio in his youth, his father turning from tenant farmer to steelworker. Colbert himself was a foundryman in Michigan's auto industry in 1930, one of the nation's vital pockets of pre-CIO industrial unionism.²⁷⁶

Many of the white men also had personal histories rooted in rural life and agricultural labor, only in the Midwest rather than the South, with the fundamental difference that they were more often from families that owned their own farms or did so themselves. Albert Gohl, of Almena, Wisconsin, grew up on a dairy farm before running his own in nearby Crystal Lake Township in 1930; by 1938 he worked at Terminal Storage. John Wick had a farm in Sand Creek Township, Minnesota. Daniel Bartell, the local's financial secretary in 1939, grew up on a farm in Marblehead, Wisconsin, and by 1918 was self-employed on his own farm in the Town of Milwaukee. He apparently supplemented his income with wage work at one of Milwaukee's cement plants, where he worked in 1920, and where he may have first encountered waterfront unionism. By 1930 he was still committed to establishing himself as a farmer,

²⁷⁶ One of the best studies of radical unionism in the auto industry at the time Colbert would have been would have been there is Roger Keeran, *The Communist Party and the Auto Workers' Unions* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980).

then living on land he purchased in the town of Genesee, further out west in Waukesha County. Of course, fate had other plans; by the late Thirties he was back in Milwaukee, working the waterfront.

These men seem to share the profile of the lake seamen described by Larrowe, with two additional observations: first, most of them apparently relocated to Milwaukee altogether, leaving behind rural life; second, men like Gohl fell a very long way down to the waterfront, losing not a higher-paying job but their own property and freedom from wage labor. The Milwaukee docks thus absorbed not only black men who fled the collapsing agricultural economy and oppression of the South, but white men who were casualties of the collapsing agricultural economy of the Midwest, who saw a certain vision of independence torn away, or at least deferred. It is impossible to know just how such experiences – especially when held in common with many others, including new colleagues on the docks – tended to incline them in ideological terms. But it is easy to imagine them being pushed in both directions: an identification of the source of their troubles as the national economic system itself, rather than their own personal faults; a conviction that organization and collective action in economic self-defense was therefore virtuous and just; and yet, a sense of extreme caution motivated by the desire to return (at least) to their previous class position, and fear that losing work on the waterfront would prolong their pursuit.

Among those white men for whom I could find any documents indicating prior history in the wage labor force, work on the waterfront also seemed to be a downgrade – in some cases larger than that faced by the black industrial workers, seeing as whites had greater access to skilled trades as well as white collar and professional positions. Thomas Loe had grown up on his father's farm in rural Minnesota, but unlike Bartell or Gohl, sought to make a life in the city. In 1930 he worked as a shipping clerk for a machine shop before winding up on the docks. Stanley Silinskis, one of the local's Lithuanian migrants, worked as a skilled grinder in a machine shop. Anthony Kluzinski had also worked as a

machinist in the city's auto industry. Harry Krovitz from Russia, like Silinskis, worked in a machine shop, but as an unskilled helper. It is notable that, rather than the foundries that black workers tended to find themselves in, the white men with industrial backgrounds were in machine shops, doing labor recognized as skilled or getting access to skills, and working in much more tolerable conditions. Again, these jobs would have provided greater stability, better pay, and fewer hazards than the waterfront.

Yet some of the white men had much more modest beginnings, or even seemed "down-and-out." Arvin Peltier of Minnesota was working as a farm laborer in Somerset, Minnesota in 1930 – he is called a "servant" on the Census, working for a family other than his own, about whom nothing could be found. Kasimir Migacz was born in Milwaukee in 1902, just after his parents migrated from Poland; his father was an illiterate odd-jobs laborer. In 1930, Migacz was an engine fireman by trade, but was incarcerated at the Milwaukee County House of Correction in Granville. Ernest Timmerman was born in Oshkosh shortly before his father died; in 1910, at the age of seven, he was in the care of the State School of Dependent and Neglected Children in Sparta. He was a farm laborer in 1920 and incarcerated at Minnesota's Winona County Jail in 1930.

In short, the Milwaukee waterfront in the Depression era not only brought together workers across boundaries of race and nationality but also men of diverse class backgrounds and experiences which cut across race. Among the white men in particular, there were wildly different class experiences: some growing up with the expectation that they would be a self-employed landowner or have a middle-class professional career, others part of an agricultural or industrial proletariat whose lives had always been defined by marginality. The latter were, perhaps, all but bound for the life the waterfront had to offer, and the former may have felt themselves deprived of their due – more to the point, they may have been as unlikely an alliance to one another as black and white workers had been. In some respects, *their* unification is as interesting as the interracial character of the local. At minimum, it is plausible that

class divisions among white longshoremen in the Depression-era waterfront could have helped to undermine the formation of any exclusionary white bloc.

A final observation must be made about the class experience of the ILA 815 men – as mentioned before, they were highly vulnerable to unemployment. Based on employment data gleaned from draft registration records, if "unemployed" was considered an employer, it would be the third biggest. Many men were thrown onto the relief rolls by the vagaries of the lakewise trade, and especially into WPA projects. Some probably worked on the same projects together. They thus not only shared the experience of unemployment but were brought into a common constituency by the relief agencies across racial and indeed class lines. People with otherwise disparate backgrounds and allegiances now could develop a shared identity as relief-recipients, focus their organizing efforts on the agencies as co-constituents in a struggle for better treatment, defend the agencies against right-wing assaults, and organize to expand them.²⁷⁷ For those who joined the Wisconsin Workers Alliance or sought it out for assistance in addressing a grievance, their representative would probably have been then-ILA president, Aaron Toliver, whose role as a leader of the unemployed is discussed in the next chapter.

By way of conclusion: The data in this chapter must be taken as suggestive, and any conclusions drawn from them provisional. Nevertheless, there are some insights into factors that might have contributed to Local 815's early success as a militant interracial union, and its later transformation into a conservative business union. To my mind, the best candidate for helping to explain the rise of militant interracial unionism was a geographically concentrated and highly politically engaged black working-class community in the Sixth Ward, from whence basically all the black longshoremen came. This has the benefit also of agreeing, at least in part, with previous research by Gerteis and Virdee. The fact that

²⁷⁷ Again, see Goldberg, "T.H. Marshall Meets Pierre Bourdieu."

many came to the waterfront not as awed rural greenhorns – as established Milwaukeeans often made out recent black migrants to be – but as seasoned industrial workers also strikes me as relevant, especially given how many of these men went on to be leaders in the local. I also suspect that a pattern of wage inequality that tended to cut across racial lines rather than along them, and the division of the local’s white members by class background, class trajectory, and migrant status acted as “negative” factors in the sense that they helped to prevent the formation of a coherent white bloc.

As for the conservative shift, I think that any factors tending to increase the fear of unemployment are important, especially given the concrete circumstances in which the expulsion of the left-wing leadership occurred. Here we might reasonably speculate that older migrant workers and precariously-employed-but-geographically-rooted men (i.e., men for whom seeking work elsewhere might be too costly of an option) will generally have less of an appetite for risky tactics if it seems like not even the protective aegis of the hiring hall can defend their jobs – as when, for instance, a major employer threatens to stop calling at the port. The extent of wage inequality – not between racial groups, but overall – also suggests considerable inequality in investment in the organization, willingness to make sacrifices for it, and interest in defending any of its leadership factions.

Chapter 5: Two Faces of the Milwaukee Waterfront: Aaron Toliver and John Brzek

In this chapter, I take a more in-depth look at the two principal leaders of the local in its pre- and post-transformational periods. Two things come through in these brief political-biographical sketches. First, they describe the concrete organizational and political organizational ecosystem that comprised the context in which Local 815 operated and shaped the two men. Second, they help to capture the shift in the union's orienting vision as it jumped the track from rank-and-file, class struggle unionism under Toliver to business unionism under Brzek. In short, this chapter outlines the form of consciousness and class practices of the two leaders.

Toliver represented for Local 815 a link to the various progressive and radical projects of the New Deal era – the organization of the unemployed, attempts to build a working-class political party, the struggle for black civil rights, and the struggle for fair housing. These were not abstract problems for the longshoremen; in particular, most longshoremen themselves endured unemployment, and many worked on WPA or other relief projects, and so it was no stretch to see how their fate was tied up with that of the unemployed. Many longshoremen, and particularly the black longshoremen of the Sixth Ward, also suffered slum conditions on account of overcrowded and deteriorating housing stock. Indeed, the question of housing and labor's role in the housing struggle was also central to the whole political development of Milwaukee, both in terms of its postwar departure from Socialist-influenced governance and the intensification and solidification of anti-black racism in the city, and set the stage for

the fair housing fights waged by the radical NAACP youth movement in the late 1960s.²⁷⁸ The connection to these movements and the project of class-formation they represented was severed with the expulsion of Toliver and his comrades in 1942.

Brzek's leadership entailed not only the loss of these connections, but an altogether different trajectory of class formation – a different set of priorities, practices, and alliances. In contrast to Toliver's "horizontal" coalition that sought to unite various elements of the broad working-class movement in Milwaukee, Brzek organized "vertically", making common cause with stevedore firms, ship lines, and the municipal port authorities, seeking not to develop a working class-for-itself but to make Milwaukee "the best port on the Great Lakes".²⁷⁹ Brzek pursued this endeavor with honesty and competence, believing it to be essential to the long-term welfare of Local 815, and he probably could not have been more successful in bringing in labor in as a partner in the management and development of the Port of Milwaukee. While this did not mean an outright reversal of the interracial character of the local – the proportion of black membership would continue to grow, and Brzek would enforce a strict policy against interpersonal racism among the members – it did mean that the longshoremen's union was a piece taken off the board in the local civil rights struggles.

1. Aaron Toliver

Aaron Toliver was the central figure of Local 815 from its revival in 1934 to his expulsion in 1942. He is the local's first recorded vice president and served continuously on its executive board from the local's

²⁷⁸ For the best treatment of the connection between the decline of working-class urban politics, the rise of real estate and finance capital in Milwaukee, the crystallization of the Inner Core as a black ghetto, and the sharpening of white racism, see Eric Fure-Slocum, *Contesting the Postwar City: Working Class and Growth Politics in 1940's Milwaukee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). For the late 60s housing struggle, see Jones, *The Selma of the North*.

²⁷⁹ "Longshoremen Leader Pledges to Make City 'Best Port'," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 11, 1959, p. 1.

inception until his membership was revoked, sometimes as president and almost always as its *de facto* president. His is among the union's signatories on virtually every contract signed with all employers until that time, and is frequently the author and recipient of the union's correspondence, although this task was sometimes handled by the recording secretary instead. He presided over, and was the driving force behind, the local's early insurgent and willful posture toward employers, quickly forcing the latter to recognize the local and winning annual improvements in wages and conditions thereafter. The establishment of a union hiring hall in Milwaukee – the only Great Lakes port to achieve one – can be credited in large part to Toliver's efforts, and suggests that the early leadership cohort of the Milwaukee ILA had taken a keen interest in the recent achievements of their West Coast counterparts. What is especially interesting about Toliver is not only the headstrong quality of his leadership vis-a-vis employers, but also the extent to which his activity reflects the connection between the black struggle, the labor movement, and the left.

Toliver was born in 1896 or 97 near Kerens, Texas, and worked on his parents' own farm there until joining the great northward movement of blacks in the World War I years. By June 1918, he was in Milwaukee working as a laborer at Solvay Coke and Gas along the western side of the Kinnickinnic River. Looking up from his work east toward Lake Michigan, he would see the quaint settlement of Kashubian fishermen-squatters on Jones Island; in the next decade, the city would evict them to make way for the outer harbor facilities that would become Local 815's turf. He left Solvay to join the army, serving in the 812th Pioneer Infantry.²⁸⁰

²⁸⁰ The Pioneer regiments were segregated non-combatant regiments meant to provide essential labor to the war effort. Pioneer infantrymen dug trenches, graves and latrines, built bridges, roads and hospitals, laid railroad tracks, and transported materiel, including as longshoremen (Lefferts 2016). Regiments 810 and 812 were domestic service units.

In 1920, he was working as a helper in a wholesale meat business and living in the home of his father-in-law, a foundryman. In 1925, a different life was closed to him when the city council denied him a license to open a dance hall on grounds that he had a previous criminal charge for carrying a concealed weapon. The council declined to extend the "usual courtesy" of allowing him to withdraw the application.²⁸¹ Presumably it would not be long before he found work on the waterfront, eventually getting on a regular boat gang on the GLTC line, although no record of him exists again until two appear in 1935: his election to the vice presidency of Local 815, and as chaplain of the Col. Charles Young Post (No. 389) of the American Legion veterans' association, the only black Legion post in the state. Commenting upon his candidacy in the latter election he said he was still "called upon to preserve the ideals of our country."²⁸²

Chybowski, based on the accounts of informants John Brzek and longtime rank-and-file longshoreman Joe Gnader, describes Toliver as bringing "an effective combination of leadership and bossism...well suited to the waterfront conditions" of the time. Mimicking Toliver's accent, Gnader recalled that "I's da power" became something of a personal motto for the local leader. There is no doubt of Toliver's authoritarian leadership style, in which fines and physical force might be used to straighten out disrespectful or disruptive members. The executive board had total latitude to impose such fines, set them, waive them, and apply conditions to them; big longshoremen were appointed to stand guard at meetings and carry out the executives' commands to throw someone out if necessary. But Gnader was referring also to Toliver's willingness to flex the union's muscle with employers, contrasting the radical's style with that of the local's first leader, Chicago ILA appointee Thomas

²⁸¹ "'Gun toter' can't run dance hall." *Milwaukee Sentinel*, January 31, 1925, p. 5.

²⁸² "Legion Officers Pledge Colored Post Their Help," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 5, 1935, p. 4. Toliver's job is attested only in ILA 815 Records, Volume 2, Box 1, June 19, 1941.

Brennan, whose method was only “a lot of talk”. In his recollections about employers' wage theft, such as starting the pay clock well after the work had already begun, and other such tactics, Gnader put it simply: “With Toliver there was no fooling around, you found out after a while that you wouldn't want to ruffle his feathers. On the job whenever there was a problem, he was the one to stop the work.... That stuff [employers' taking advantage] stopped with Toliver. His tactic was to stop the operation... Toliver got results." He displayed an open disdain for the waterfront employers in particular and big business in general, and frequently spoke out on "non-workplace" political issues of the day. Toliver served as president of the local from 1936-37, and again in 1940, but in the interim the force and quality of his leadership was such that he remained the *de facto* head of the local; at any rate, he was always on the executive board.²⁸³

These years of Local 815's heyday saw Toliver's influence rise across various fields in the Milwaukee political scene, becoming a local public figure. In 1937 he was a featured speaker in the city's May Day parade, representing the longshoremen.²⁸⁴ Aside from Local 815 and the veterans, he was also a leader among the unemployed. By 1936, he had already distinguished himself as a major figure in the Workers' Alliance of America, the union of New Deal relief workers, being elected to the executive board of the Wisconsin chapter (WWA) that year. On Monday, February 28, 1938, some 550 relief workers employed on a project to channelize the Milwaukee River on the city's north side initiated a sit-down strike. The immediate reason was that their paychecks were four days overdue, but when they received their checks the following day, they demanded also that they be paid for the duration of the strike and that they receive two hours' pay for reporting to the worksite when dismissed for inclement weather. It was Toliver who led this action; he was, by then, the chairman of the WWA No. 1 and the senior steward

²⁸³ Chybowski, 14

²⁸⁴ “Costello to Speak at May Day Fete,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 28, 1937, p.18.

of the shift who went on strike. With the strike under his leadership, the entire county-wide WWA, representing between four and five thousand members, threatened to strike in sympathy unless the WPA administration met the demands of the men on the river project.²⁸⁵ His leadership in the strike brought him even greater influence in the unemployed movement, and he was elected to the executive board of the state organization that summer and to the vice chairmanship of the county organization in January 1939.²⁸⁶

Toliver's leadership in the Popular Front extended past the WWA to the Wisconsin Conference on Social Legislation (WCSL), the preeminent legislative arm of the movement in the state. Organized in 1937, WCSL was a statewide coalition of labor unions, elected officials, public intellectuals, civic leaders, religious groups, ethnic associations, and other groups, organized "to formulate a broad social legislative program based on the needs of the people and to provide an opportunity for collective action by organizations and individuals favoring such legislation," in the words its secretary Thomas Casey, a leader in the railway conductors' union. Toliver was listed among the members of the first sponsoring committee of both the statewide and county-level organizations.²⁸⁷

Toliver's involvement in the WCSL red-flagged him to his opponents in Local 815, being the main activity outside of Local 815 mentioned explicitly in the expulsion proceedings; his role in the WWA would be raised only as an afterthought, well after his expulsion was complete. This is curious, as his role in the WCSL seemed somewhat more superficial, and the lists of the nearly fifty members of the sponsoring committee for the Milwaukee County Conference and some eighty members for the

²⁸⁵ "WPA Men Sit All Night on Park Jobs; to Continue," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 1, 1938, p. 1; "4,000 of Alliance Ready to Join WPA Sitdown," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 2, 1938, p. 3.

²⁸⁶ "Ludwigsen Re-elected by Workers' Alliance," *Milwaukee Journal*, June 13, 1938, p. 16; "New Officers Picked By Workers' Alliance," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, January 6, 1938, p. 4.

²⁸⁷ WSHS, Milwaukee County Industrial Union Council (IUC) Records, Folder 1, Box 2. "Proceedings of the Milwaukee County Conference On Progressive Legislation," October 9, 1938; 1940. *Capital Times*, April 16, p.20.

statewide WCSL strike one as rather polite company. Some known CIO radicals such as Harold Christoffel and Emil Costello appear, but so do other less radical AFL and railway brotherhood leaders, county board supervisors, school principals and teachers, leaders of Democratic Party clubs, representatives of the YMCA, church groups and medical associations, and other reputable groups. Moreover, his work in the WWA was genuinely disruptive, while the extent of WCSL activity was the drafting of legislative agendas and releasing statements of opposition or support to various bills at the state and national levels. Their public opposition to an effort to bar the Communist Party from the ballot in Wisconsin may have had some looking askance, but Communists, of course, had no monopoly on opposition to such measures, especially in the pre-McCarthyist period.²⁸⁸

The WCSL, however, came under a great deal of unwanted attention in 1939 when three former members of the Communist Party in Milwaukee – Ferrell Schnering, Kenneth Goff, and William Ryan – testified against their former comrades to the House Committee on Un-American Activities. Schnering and Goff charged that the WCSL was not a genuine organization but merely an "innocents' club" – an organization established on the pretense of representing a broad cross-section of progressive and community forces with the ulterior motive of increasing Communist influence and recruiting among them. Elements of their testimony were covered in the city's paper for weeks, on the front page or with full-page features, with specific charges against the WCSL printed repeatedly.²⁸⁹ In 1941, the anticommunist campaign – now sponsored by the Wisconsin legislature's "Little Dies" committee – would hit Toliver again, this time more directly. Kenneth Goff mentioned Toliver by name and accused him of conspiring with other Communist Party labor leaders in 1936 to create a plan for industrial

²⁸⁸ Capital Times, *ibid.*

²⁸⁹ "Grasp of Reds in State Told," *Milwaukee Journal*, June 9, 1939, p.1; "Communism Spreading Through State, Assembly Told", *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 23, 1939, p.10.

sabotage at Allis-Chalmers and other plants to undermine potential US war efforts in the near future.²⁹⁰ Shortly after the sensational publicity around Goff's testimony, Milwaukee's FTC – still under the influence of the old guard Socialist AFL leaders – blocked Local 815 from seating Aaron Toliver as a delegate after the credentials committee "accused him of communistic activities".²⁹¹ Another year later, when John Brzek wrote up formal charges against the expelled men – which were made entirely retroactively, over two weeks after the expulsions were made effective – he did not mention this grave charge, instead referring only, in Toliver's case, to the Conference. Toliver distinguished himself as well in his neighborhood, first as a leading member of the People's Better Homes League in 1937, and then as a founding member of what was essentially a ward-level organization of the WCSL, called the Sixth Ward Conference for Civic Betterment and Social Legislation (hereafter SWC). Trotter describes how the depth of the economic crisis in the Depression era created greater unity among black workers and professionals; the sponsors committee of the Better Homes League confirms one clear instance of this, with the added feature of being an interracial effort.²⁹² Toliver was the secretary of the conference, and LeRoy Johnson of PWOC and the Wisconsin Industrial Union Council was a sponsor. So were attorney James Dorsey (three-time Sixth Ward alderman candidate), Dr. P. Jay Gilmer of the NAACP and William Kelley of the Milwaukee Urban League. George Hamilton, the UNIA-backed Sixth Ward candidate in 1932, was also a member. John Kaiser, a white laborer employed by the city, served as chairman *pro tem*. Black and white clergy joined as well. Thus, the conference was formed "to provide a means

²⁹⁰ "They Ridicule 'Red' Charges," Milwaukee Journal, April 10, 1941, p.11. See also, e.g.: Journal of Proceedings of Sixty-Fifth Session of the Wisconsin State Legislature, Vol. 2 (1941), 2194.

²⁹¹ ILA 815 Records, Folder 6, Box 9. 1941, D. Richards to Federated Trades Council, Dec. 16.

²⁹² Trotter, e.g.: xi, 134, 159-60, 196-97, 213.

through which all organizations of the Sixth Ward may cooperate to improve the conditions of the people in the ward."²⁹³

The key demands of SWC were formulated at its April 15 meeting, attended by sixty delegates representing nearly 5,000 people across twenty-eight different ward organizations. The program developed at this meeting give an indication of the deterioration of the neighborhood that black businessmen and black workers shared: No rent discrimination against blacks; the construction of a new home for each demolished; construction of affordable housing on city-owned lots; stricter enforcement of building codes; a WPA project for pest extermination; elimination of wood stove heating; installation of electric lights at landlords' expense; an end to "indiscriminate dumping"; and the construction of medical, pre-natal, and dental clinics. Delegate Henry Mielcarek, district relief director, in motivating a government housing construction program said that "not twelve houses in the Sixth Ward were habitable." Other resolutions moved to address racial discrimination in schools and oppose "the increase of antisemitic propaganda in the Sixth Ward" and the showing in a downtown theater of the pro-KKK film *The Birth of a Nation*.²⁹⁴

Toliver also led in all-black organizations. His role as the chaplain for the Charles Young Post of the American Legion has already been mentioned; with fellow veteran-leader Lee Medley, he also served on the executive board of the Iowa Advancement Club, a local chapter of the Associated Negro Clubs. I could find no information about the Associated Negro Clubs and cannot speak to its character, but it seems to have been a loose coalition of black neighborhood improvement groups. In Milwaukee,

²⁹³ "Raskin Heads Housing Group," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 17, 1937, p. 1; "Sixth Ward Unites for a Conference," *Milwaukee Journal*, April 9, 1939, p.23; "Move to Better the 6th Ward," *Milwaukee Journal*, April 16, 1939, p.21.

²⁹⁴ "Sixth Ward Asks Housing, Health Aids," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 16, 1939, p.6. The Sixth Ward also had a large concentration of Milwaukee's Jewish community. Louis Rotter, a Russian Jewish baker in the Sixth Ward, was one of the conference's organizers.

the Iowa Advancement Club, which met at the Urban League headquarters, had a distinctly proletarian character. In 1940, Medley, a founding member and once president of the group, worked as a sweeper for the WPA. Jessie Smith, treasurer, lived with her son who worked as a tavern porter; trustee Richard Cross lived with Ms. Smith and her son as a lodger and worked as a serviceman for a pest extermination company; financial secretary Nettie Brown's husband was a foreman on a WPA street project; Laurence Lee, trustee, was a worker on a WPA park project; Charles Rhodes, trustee, worked as a janitor. Vice president Toliver was, of course, a longshoreman. In fact, Toliver's listed affiliation for the Milwaukee County Conference on Progressive Legislation was the Iowa Advancement Club, not the ILA 815.²⁹⁵

In the years from the reemergence of Local 815 to his ouster from that organization, then, Toliver was all over the city's political and social movement scene. Toliver's position as chairman and senior steward within the WAA, combined with the tendency for longshoremen toward un- and underemployment, meant that there were a fair number of workers whom he led on two fronts – the waterfront and the relief rolls.²⁹⁶ The black veterans under him in the Charles Young Post also would likely have known him as a WWA leader; in 1935, when the post had twenty-eight members, only three were employed. Black veterans among the leading longshoremen may also have been a supportive element in the local for Toliver: Hobart Wharton, senior steward at the Nugent Contracting Company, and Willie Hemmitt, executive board trustee, both served in local leadership with Toliver, and both were also World War I veterans. In his own neighborhood, Toliver led efforts to improve the quality of housing, education, and health in the SWC and the Iowa Advancement Club. He also emerged as a

²⁹⁵ It is unclear why he made this choice; he uses his ILA 815 affiliation on the sponsors' list for the statewide WCSL body.

²⁹⁶ Toliver, heading a committee of three Local 815 executive board members, set up a meeting with Benjamin Glassberg, Milwaukee County Relief Superintendent, concerning the matter of union longshoremen being denied relief, presumably because their access to intermittent waterfront work made them ineligible; Glassberg reversed the policy. (ILA 815 Records, Volume 1, Box 1, 1938, "Report of the Executive Board," December 15.)

political figure in the Sixth Ward, serving as a committeeman for the Progressive Party as mentioned in section 4 above.

The record of Toliver's activity seems to elevate him from a minor and brief local union leader to a central figure in overlapping networks of labor, left-wing, and black civil rights institutions in Milwaukee. As president of Local 815, he was clearly committed to a militant philosophy of trade unionism that emphasized class-based modes of identity and political formation over narrower occupational modes. A look at the record shows that in fact he was simultaneously preoccupied with a much larger interracial labor constituency in the WWA. He also organized in the black community under the aegis of the American Legion and the Iowa Advancement Club, which brought together mainly working-class blacks, and built broad-based coalitions such as the Sixth Ward Conference that represented both an interracial project and an interclass, intraracial one. He saw the conditions of the docks, the dole, and the Sixth Ward slums as elements of a total social reality, and the outrages of racial oppression and class domination as connected. His practice was rooted in a broad, political conception of class, and a struggle to create a "class-for-itself".

Appropriately enough, then, his activism did not end after his expulsion from the longshoremen, even if his stature as a labor leader was reduced. He found work at the A.O. Smith Corporation, manufacturer of automotive frames, where he joined the union there – known colloquially as the Smith Steel Workers, formally FLU 19806.²⁹⁷ A.O. Smith had been a major offender in the city when it came to racial discrimination and came under investigation in 1942 by the FEPC. When they finally relented, they

²⁹⁷ FLU stands for federal labor union, sometimes DALU or directly affiliated labor union, and designates an industrial union that formed under the auspices of the AFL's direct affiliation system that had been a sop to industrial unionists in the AFL prior to the formation of the CIO. These unions had no international of their own, hence their "direct affiliation" to the AFL, and had little in the way of independence. Most were integrated into some or another international after jurisdictional matters had been sorted out, and many wound up in the CIO after the split; the Smith Steel Workers were an interesting case who maintained their FLU status. As late as the 1970s they were still known as FLU 19806.

hired twenty new black workers, but employed only three on the production line, which was still the situation by 1943.²⁹⁸ Toliver was among these first black hires at Smith, though it is not known what position he held in those days, but he eventually held a job as an inspector there.²⁹⁹ By 1949, he won election to the negotiating committee in the union. The Smith Steel Workers had been among the most "peaceful" of the labor organizations of the era; their first strike was not until 1974. While Toliver may well have been an effective union leader at Smith, he clearly did not have the same sort of opportunity for an aggressive posture, coming in as part of a miniscule and sidelined black minority within a union that had already been established before he ever arrived.³⁰⁰

He led the American Legion's Young Post well into his twilight years, becoming its commander, or highest executive officer, in the 1950s. In 1957, Toliver led the post – along with the newer Cpl. Cornice D. Grace Post (No. 455) – in a movement to desegregate the Legion's "40 et 8" social events committee, which maintained a color bar in its initiation rituals. At the state convention in Wausau that year, the black Legionnaires put forward a resolution calling on the Wisconsin Legion to demand that the national organization go on record opposing discrimination by the 40 et 8 Society. "There is not a delegate here today," said Toliver to the body, "who doesn't know right from wrong; today we must separate truth from error." The state convention rejected the resolution, ostensibly on the basis that the body had no jurisdiction over 40 et 8, and only after three votes and "careful explanation" by the white leadership as to why inaction was justified.³⁰¹

²⁹⁸ Trotter, 169.

²⁹⁹ "Deaths and Funerals," *Milwaukee Journal*, February 3, 1965, p.31.

³⁰⁰ "Groups Name New Officers," *Milwaukee Journal*, November 10, 1949, p.72.

³⁰¹ "Col. Young Post Elects," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, July 2, 1941, p. 7; "Heads Legion Post," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 11, 1945, p.4; "Ask 40 et 8 To Drop Ban," *Milwaukee Journal*, June 25, 1957, p. 28; "Legion Posts Protest Bias," *Milwaukee Defender*, June 27, 1957; "'Rap Trinke' Move Beaten," *Milwaukee Journal*, July 22, 1957, p.1.

Toliver was also a spiritual leader. Of course, he had been the chaplain among the veterans as early as 1935. Later, he helped to establish the Friendship Missionary Baptist Church in late 1945 and was identified as the chairman of the board of deacons in 1946. A conflict within the church broke out in which Toliver had been the target of an attempted smear campaign, and which was gleefully covered by the Milwaukee press. Six of the other deacons and perhaps the church's pastor Rev. Lawrence Staples, who opposed Toliver, received "anonymous letters from Chicago, which attacked Brother Toliver's character in scandalous words" in mid-August 1946. Staples shared and spread whatever allegations were contained in the letters, which was never explicitly revealed. When guest preacher Rev. Frank Williamson spoke the following Sunday, he apparently made personal reference to the allegations against Toliver, who shouted, mid-sermon, that Mr. Williamson ought "to keep to the Gospel or sit down." He was arrested for the outburst, released on bail, and then immediately convened a meeting of the deacons and trustees, who decided to suspend Rev. Staples. The congregation settled the matter once and for all in Toliver's favor when the members, backing Toliver, voted to oust the pastor on the grounds of "un-Christian and unministerial conduct" and of "being a scandal monger". The conflict split the congregation and spelled immediate troubles for the church, but it ultimately pulled through and Friendship Missionary Baptist continues to operate up to the present.³⁰² Kenneth Goff's accusations against Toliver at the "Little Dies" hearings may have clung to him through these years. The content of the "anonymous letters" sent to his fellow deacons was not reported in the press, but around the same time the Milwaukee papers were still referring to him in 1946 as one of two "leading Negro communists" in the city, along with Joe Ellis, tannery worker and leader in the IFLWU and the CIO's local

³⁰² "Negro Baptist Church Has Plenty of Woes, Judge Finds," *Milwaukee Journal*, August 20, 1946, p. 1; "Church Votes to Fire Pastor," *Milwaukee Journal*, August 27, 1946, p. 19.

fair housing efforts.³⁰³ Ellis was public about his relationship to the party, but Toliver always denied being a member. There are good reasons to be skeptical of Goff's testimony, given the nature of his own departure from the Communist Party and his later track record. But there can be no doubt that Toliver worked closely with Communists, including inside his own local – this was, of course, quite enough for any smear campaign to stick as the Red Scare escalated. Years later, still as chairman of the board of deacons in 1955, he spoke to a community meeting at his church in the aftermath of Emmitt Till's brutal lynching, striking a tone of either grim resignation or hopeful determination depending on which paper one subscribed to: "America has set other nations right. I am wondering if there is any place where we Negroes can be safe. It looks as though they are trying to destroy the Negro race".³⁰⁴ "I think you'll understand this thing is not settled. We shall not rest or stop fighting until the right one is brought to justice."³⁰⁵ He remained active in politics as well, serving as chairman of the Sixth Ward organization for the election of Max Raskin for judge. Raskin had been the Socialist city attorney from 1932 to 1936 who had been harshly criticized by the *Milwaukee Sentinel* for his "refusal to prosecute communistic rioters".³⁰⁶ Raskin had also served as legal counsel for the longshoremen after 1936, when he was defeated in his bid for reelection and reentered private practice. He left the Socialists to join the Progressive Party in 1940 before joining the Democrats in 1944. His failed 1949 campaign marks the first clear shift for Toliver to the orbit of the Democratic Party; any party politics he is reported to engage in after this point is with the Democrats. In 1959, both he and his wife Obee were delegates to the state

³⁰³ Eric Fure-Slocum, *Contesting the Postwar City: Working-Class and Growth Politics in 1940s Milwaukee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 61, 99. "Communist Group Small but Zealous," *Milwaukee Journal*, September 22, 1946, p. 1.

³⁰⁴ "City Negroes Stirred by Till Verdict," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 24, 1955, p.7.

³⁰⁵ "Rap Verdict in Till Death," *Milwaukee Journal*, September 24, 1955, p.4.

³⁰⁶ "Milwaukee Rebukes Radicalism," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 9, 1936, p. 20.

convention of the Democratic Party.³⁰⁷ Obee had also been named to the party's state central committee in 1956.³⁰⁸

By this time, the Great Migration finally had made its belated arrival to Milwaukee, and racial tensions that may have been buried before were beginning to explode onto the surface. When police officer Thomas Grady chased down and fatally shot Daniel Bell in 1958, it precipitated a wave of intensified efforts on the part of the black community and revealed again all its old cracks under the pressure of the new Southern arrivals, rising police violence, advanced and deepening ghettoization, and escalating white hostility in the city at large. Four hundred fifty gathered in the Mount Zion Baptist Church in the wake of the inquest jury verdict that exonerated Officer Grady of any wrongdoing, and the well-worn division between self-help and protest showed itself. James Dorsey said that the killing must "be a signal to us all that we must perhaps come a little closer together, and perhaps as Negroes be a little more respectful of law and authority," while the Rev. T.T. Lovelace of Mount Zion put a finer point on it, telling the meeting that "we have created in the general population disgust, shame and fear.... We need to quit rioting among ourselves, we need to quit slashing ourselves to pieces." In response to such sentiments others warned against tolerating "the prejudice of some Negroes against other Negroes." While there was widespread disagreement with the inquest jury, of course, only Toliver and Andrew Jackson, a fellow Legionnaire, are mentioned as having pressed for filing a protest; Assemblyman Isaac Coggs and attorneys George Hamilton and George Brawley insisted that the community should wait to register its discontent at the next election.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁷ "Webb to Head Dem Delegation," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 13, 1959, p. 19.

³⁰⁸ "Democrats Pick Catlin as Their Prime Target," *Milwaukee Journal*, October 3, 1956, p. 2.

³⁰⁹ "Negroes Eye New Tragedies Curb," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 21, 1958, p. 17.

Within the Democratic Party, Toliver was part of a bitter internal fight over housing rights when four Democratic assemblymen voted with Republicans to strike down a bill outlawing racial and religious discrimination in housing put forward by black Assemblyman Isaac Coggs of Milwaukee in 1961. The episode exposed the sharpening racist reaction against black civil rights in white Milwaukee, with three of the four dissenting Democrats representing sections of the city and the surrounding suburbs to the west and south. At a meeting of the Milwaukee County party council, black delegate Clinton Rose moved to have the assemblymen censured, arguing that their vote "had made 50,000 Negroes angry". Sherman Sobocinski, one of the four, conceded the next day on the Assembly floor that his vote "may have made 50,000 Negroes very mad," but it had more importantly made "800,000 Milwaukee white people very happy." The four assemblymen who voted against the measure did not act alone, of course, but represented the growing hostility to black civil rights among white Milwaukeeans; indeed, the report notes that the party activists in Sobocinski's district had pushed him to vote against the bill. The body debated whether and how the assemblymen ought to be held to account for violating party platform, and Toliver referred to the gospel when he argued that strong measures were necessary: "if we don't drive the money changers out of the temple it's going to be destroyed." Ultimately, no action was taken; Governor Gaylord Nelson, although he supported Coggs' legislation, intervened to urge the withdrawal of the censure resolution in the name of party unity, and arguing that the resolution "would hurt rather than help the cause of civil rights".³¹⁰ Thus, as the heady days of Depression-era militancy waned and the nation embarked on the postwar era, Toliver's trajectory seemed to track the overall alignment. The Democratic Party was the undisputed gravitational center of what remained of the reformist forces that

³¹⁰ "Sobocinski Defends Vote On Negro's Bill," *Milwaukee Journal*, July 21, 1961, p. 12; "Meister Snuffs Out Storm Over Dem Rights Vote Slap," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, July 27, 1961, p. 3; "Censure Resolution Opposed By Nelson," *Milwaukee Journal*, August 17, 1961, p. 31.

had made up the New Deal coalition, and the lion's share of Socialists, Progressives, and Communists came to recognize the Democratic Party itself as the terrain on which such politics had to be won and advanced.³¹¹ The thrust of his own activism, like that of many others, shifted from the labor movement to the church, and in his later community activism, his expectations had also seemed narrowed by the city's intensifying racism. Despite the differences between them exposed by their respective reactions to Daniel Bell's murder, Toliver was installed as vice president of the Rev. T.T. Lovelace's self-help oriented Institute for Social Adjustment in its wake. Lovelace soon died and Toliver became interim president. Lovelace characterized the organization as necessary for training the new migrants in respectable and urbane habits: "We are not going to talk about prejudices which we encounter. We shall work on our own deficiencies, we shall put ourselves in a position to demand respect."³¹² Nothing in Toliver's previous activity suggested a commitment to the old self-help philosophy; indeed, to the extent he shared its precepts, he articulated them to a program of transforming social structures rather than introspective self-improvement. But many doors had closed, and new windows were yet to open; and where he had once been a newcomer from the South condescended to by the homegrown black elite of Milwaukee, he had by now long since been a Milwaukeean, and perhaps came to see things from the other side.

Toliver died in 1965 of a heart attack. His death coincided with the emergence of new activist forces in the city among the younger generation reared in the era of the classical Civil Rights Movement, and there his legacy lived on in a very literal way: his youngest son DeWayne was the Direct Action

³¹¹ In Wisconsin, as has been mentioned, the Democratic Party had been a conservative and weak institution in state politics, where the action took place almost entirely *within* the Republican Party. The leading forces of the early New Deal coalition in the state were therefore found elsewhere, chiefly around the Progressives and, in Milwaukee, the Socialists. The somewhat belated alignment of the Wisconsin Democratic Party to the more liberal national pattern occurred when Socialists and Progressives like Dan Hoan, Max Raskin, Andrew Biemiller, and others entered it. Toliver might be seen as well as an element of this movement.

³¹² "Form Groups To Help Negro Community," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 31, 1958, p.16.

chairman and one of the founders of the NAACP's Young Commandos organization, the main vehicle of the Black Power movement in Milwaukee.³¹³ Meanwhile, his elder son Aaron, Jr. waged a much more desperate resistance when he shot at two police officers who had harassed him "because he appeared intoxicated", wounding one.³¹⁴ Aaron Toliver's life in many ways reflects the articulation of the labor movement, the left, and the black struggle, and their subsequent fragmentation into the postwar "classical" civil rights era. The fates of his sons evince with almost poetic accuracy the developments taking place after the passage of the Civil Rights Act and the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.: the rise of the Black Power phase of the movement, on the one hand, and a despairing rebelliousness manifest in individual acts of violence and urban uprisings, on the other.

Based on the sketchy data about his life assembled here, it is plausible that his extraordinary personal leadership qualities were a major factor in Local 815's militant interracial character. He was charismatic and competent, waging influence and authority across numerous organizations and networks in social movements and civil society. His aggressive posture toward employers was well-suited to the Depression-era waterfront; his tactics quickly disciplined the stevedore firms into recognizing the union and signing contracts and won the respect and loyalty of the longshoremen.

2. John Brzek

John Brzek became the union's most important leader when he led the successful offensive on the union's left-wing resulting in the expulsion of Toliver and six other men, whereupon Brzek became the

³¹³ Jones, 135.

³¹⁴ "Man, 34, Charged With Murder Try," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 22, 1967, p. 24. Aaron Toliver, Jr. pled guilty to attempted murder and was sentenced to fifteen years at the Wisconsin State Prison in Waupun (see: "Term Given in Shooting," *Milwaukee Journal*, January 7, 1969, p. 23). Census records confirm that Aaron Toliver the longshoreman had a son by the name of Aaron Toliver, Jr., who was the same age as the man in the newspaper reports.

union president. Under his leadership, authority became more concentrated in the local, and he took on the roles of president, business agent, and secretary, leaving the warehouse in 1951 to become the full-time manager of the union's affairs. Brzek was an intelligent and shrewd labor administrator and negotiator, and there can be little doubt that the stable longevity of Local 815 can be credited in large part to his careful and devoted oversight. The animating principles behind his approach are more like those described for ILA founder Daniel Keefe in the last chapter: the virtue of labor unionism is in its contribution to rational and efficient production; the rights of property are to be respected, in particular the right of managers to manage the men they hire; the sanctity of contracts and the duties to each party specified therein, centrally including the duty of workers to provide continuous production; and, of course, the "plain-and-simple" formula, whereby the union does not concern itself with broad social and political questions, except perhaps where these have an immediate bearing on workplace matters.

While Aaron Toliver's leadership style reflected a political class-consciousness of a classical social-democratic sort, John Brzek's represented something much closer to job-consciousness. But this reduces him somewhat too far; he also came to see himself and Local 815 as faithful stewards of the Port of Milwaukee, earning him and the organization recognition and respect not only from port employers but the city government and the harbor commission. He developed what might in other words be called a "port-consciousness," which sought above all else to establish and preserve the position of the Port of Milwaukee as the premier western terminus of the Great Lakes shipping system. This could be achieved through the transformation of the port – from a site of class conflict to a site of rational coordination between labor, capital, and government. Port director Harry Brockel communicated as much to Socialist mayor Frank Zeidler in 1956 when giving the reasons for his confidence in the Milwaukee port's competitive position against Chicago: "The quality of waterfront labor here is good; its leadership is stable; pilferage is almost unknown; and most of the people engaged

in waterfront work here share the general community enthusiasm for Milwaukee's port development and port services. In a word, shippers find in the Port of Milwaukee...a port whose services and facilities are being enthusiastically promoted by the combined public and private enterprise of the community".³¹⁵

There is considerably less to say about John Brzek's activity up to 1942, because there is no record of his being involved in anything apart from Local 815. He was born in Milwaukee in 1917 to Polish immigrants who had arrived in 1906. His father worked as a laborer in one of the city's tanneries that had been major employers of Poles and other unskilled immigrants. He grew up in the largely Polish South Side in the Bay View neighborhood, where Polish rolling mill workers had been massacred a generation earlier. His childhood home stood near where the Kinnickinnick flowed south to carve out Jones Island. In 1933, at the age of fifteen, he began working the flour docks on the Bay View waterfront with his older brother Stanley.³¹⁶

When Local 815 reemerged in 1934, it did so further north, closer to the harbor's mouth near the three rivers' confluence in the city's industrial center; John and his older brother Stanley watched with interest from afar. It was not until the beginning of the 1935 shipping season that Local 815 came down to the smaller Bay View docks to sign up the men. They were eager to join given the bad conditions they endured. While Toliver was already in his late thirties by this time, Brzek was still an adolescent; he claimed to be twenty-one so that he could get a membership book, but he was only seventeen. His older brother Stanley became an early opponent of Toliver and his faction, running against him for president in 1936 and finishing a distant second. Given his own trajectory, not to

³¹⁵ ILA 815 Records, Folder 5, Box 8, Brockel to Zeidler, August 6, 1956.

³¹⁶ Chybowski, 58; "Dock Worker Doesn't Yearn For 'Old Days'," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 23, 1959, p. 3.

mention the family connection, it seems a safe assumption that John voted for Stanley and supported the opposition faction.³¹⁷

While Brzek was certainly pro-union, he was not immediately inspired to throw himself into its affairs. In fact, it had been none other than Aaron Toliver who saw in Brzek qualities that would make him an effective union leader and prodded him to get more involved in the union. As a young man barely twenty years old, the encouragement from the local's central figure no doubt inspired confidence in him, and he began to develop into a leader in his own right: he was elected steward at the National Terminals Company in 1937, an at-large member of the executive board in 1938, and vice president in 1940. By his own account, some of the officers took a somewhat lackadaisical interest in leading the local, allowing the more active officers to take the helm; he may himself been one of them, refusing renomination for the vice president position in 1941 because, as he put it, "the grief wasn't worth it." It was not until the conservative insurgency that he led in 1942 that Brzek – believing for certain that, failing the ouster of Toliver and his faction, that jobs on the waterfront would be lost – committed himself permanently to the direction of Local 815.³¹⁸

In his interviews with Chybowski, Brzek both exhibits a certain righteousness in his reminiscences about how he led the struggle against "the Commies" in the local, as well as a basic respect for Toliver that seems more natural than begrudging. In fact, in the period while the expulsions were taking place, there is no recorded discussion of placing Toliver or the others on a blacklist to prevent them from seeking work on the docks again, and in the end, they were not blacklisted. Brzek also reported that Toliver would periodically come to the local's office "to visit pleasantly with Brzek".³¹⁹

³¹⁷ Chybowski, 12, 15.

³¹⁸ Ibid., 46.

³¹⁹ Ibid., 45.

Given the latter's staunch anticommunism and its role in the expulsions, this is a little curious. One interpretation is that, despite his antiradical commitments, Brzek simply could not forget that Toliver had believed in him and was fond of the man on a personal level. Another interpretation is that there was an essentially instrumental underpinning to the allegations of Communist connections – that their purpose was, in other words, less strictly to make an ideological statement and rather more simply to win the immediate fight by getting the rank-and-file votes and the support from the international leadership to carry out the coup.

The actual process whereby the expulsions took place will be looked at with more depth in the next chapter; for now, I will briefly summarize the character of Brzek's leadership after the expulsions went through. As mentioned above, after the dust settled, Brzek was in charge. As to his personal style, there are contrasting views. There is Chybowski's highly sympathetic portrait, based largely on his interviews with Brzek, and so Brzek's views of himself; there is the image of Brzek in the eyes of employers and the harbor commission, which track closely to the Brzek constructed by the Milwaukee press; and finally, there are the workers of Local 815.

While he criticized the Toliver administration for what often seemed like an arbitrary exercise of authority – which certainly has truth to it – Brzek's administration was no less authoritarian. Indeed, the formal structure of authority in the local shifted to be *more* centralized and top-down after the 1942 expulsions, and Brzek's "bossism" was more complete than Toliver's, with Brzek for a time acting simultaneously as president, business agent, and secretary-treasurer. Chybowski naively attributes this to his popularity, only reflecting "the amount of control the membership was willing to vest in him." Brzek regarded himself, quite aptly, a "man in the middle," whose esteem and longevity as the longshoremen's leader was based on his ability to understand the common ground between the

employers and the workers and to appease both. Brzek was certainly respected and even liked by most of the waterfront employers as well as the harbor commissioners.³²⁰

The Milwaukee papers lauded Brzek as responsible, reasonable, and moderate, exorcising from the port the twin evils of delinquency and radicalism. Best of all, from the papers' point of view, was that Brzek was nothing like a longshoreman; perhaps he made the men of the waterfront less like longshoremen, too. A front-page article in the *Milwaukee Journal* in 1956 established the basic formula: "A profound change has taken place quietly on Milwaukee's bustling waterfront. The old-time, shiftless dock walloper who worked for whisky money, then disappeared until the bottle was dry, is the unlamented victim of the change." "Equally unmourned," it continues, "is the passing of the pre-World War II state of labor relations when a radical union leadership, since ousted, displayed a fondness for the wildcat work stoppages." A five-part series by the *Milwaukee Sentinel* in 1959, marking the imminent opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway, repeated these themes *ad infinitum*, emphasizing the stable and domesticated nature of the contemporary dock workers and the desire for more such men, celebrating the ouster of the reckless and conniving "ruling clique" who were "just as bad" as the employers, and commending the local on its good relationship with port director Harry Brockel. It is not much of a stretch to suggest that these articles functioned as advertisements to shippers for the Port of Milwaukee in anticipation of the opening of the Seaway. A headline two weeks later heralded the rise of "The 'New' 815": gone were the days when longshoremen "took a leisurely view of their duties," and the union was now committed to "making Milwaukee the best port on the Great Lakes".³²¹

³²⁰ Ibid., 47-48.

³²¹ "Good Labor Relations Bode Well For Port," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 22, 1959, p.1; "Dock Worker Doesn't Yearn For 'Old Days'," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 23, 1959, p. 3; "Dockmen Toss Bouquet To Brockel," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 24, 1959, p. 5; "More Family Men' Is Goal," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 26, 1959, p.10. "The 'New' 815," *Milwaukee Journal*, July 5, 1959, p.17.

As for the man himself, in 1973 the *Journal* announced upon Brzek's retirement that the "soft voiced" "peacekeeper" was leaving the docks. He "never lived up to the movie image of a brawling, fast dealing longshore boss," but instead "went to church and lighted special candles" and "prayed that his men would not get involved" when, some years prior, violence had threatened to break out in a labor dispute on the lakes. Brzek himself was more candid in his interviews with Chybowski, confessing to outbursts, as when he caught men gambling and overturned the tables or "almost stabbed a man in his office with a butcher knife" that he kept for protection, in the incident that precipitated the self-reflection that would send Brzek back to the Church. Still, the overall impression that he gave to his interviewer was that he was "affable...warm and genuine, completely unassuming," and comparable to a "slightly indulgent parish priest," caring and paternalistic.³²²

Mike Zetteler, a Milwaukee counterculture writer and longshoreman who worked the docks in the last few years of Brzek's tenure, remembered the brimstone fury more than the priestly demeanor. He recalls having himself "often witnessed Brzek's ferocious outbreaks," and his conversations with the older men at the time gave him the impression that these were a routine feature of life in the local, rather than merely a recent signal of the leader's loosening grip. The purpose of this observation is not to impugn or condemn Brzek; only to point out that if the basic problem of winning compliance to union policy in a highly casualized and fragmented membership pressured Toliver and the early leadership to lean on heavy-handed enforcement measures, it exerted the same pressure on Brzek. This thread seems to run through the two administrations.³²³

³²² Chybowski, 49; "Peacekeeper to Leave Docks," *Milwaukee Journal*, April 16, 1973, p. 25.

³²³ Author interview with Mike Zetteler, December 9, 2017; and Mike Zetteler, "Sacks and Violence: Milwaukee Longshoremen (And A Few Pioneering Women) Battle Their Image," Zonyx Report, 2000, <http://www.zonyx.net/TEXTS/Sacks-Vi.html>.

Indeed, even Chybowski's highly sympathetic account notes Brzek's authoritarian bent. While the local had liberally used fines to punish members for various infractions as drunkenness or fighting on the job since well before Brzek's leadership, he raised the stakes qualitatively. A typical fine for fighting on the job prior to 1942 was \$5 or \$10 – practically equivalent to a whole day or two's work then. In 1945, Brzek imposed a fine on Hobart Wharton, longtime senior steward and sometime executive board member, for using bad language and threatening to strike a coworker. Rather than \$5, or even \$15 – used in what was seen as extreme cases under Toliver's administration – Wharton was hit with a \$50 fine. Also unlike prior standard practice, in which fined members usually had some period of time to pay off their fine before being kicked off the job, Wharton's fine was to be paid in full before he could return to work. Brzek also ruled that a second disturbance would draw another \$50 fine, and a third would mean expulsion.³²⁴

The key differences between Toliver and Brzek were not to be found in the stylistic features of their leadership, but in what they envisioned as the basic purpose of trade unionism. The previous section examined Toliver's activity to get a sense for the animating philosophy of his leadership. Once Brzek became the head of the local, how did he lead? To what other groups or forces did he attempt to articulate the local's projects? What ideology informed him?

Brzek was remembered by Joe Gnader – his coworker on the Bay View docks, childhood friend, and next-door neighbor – as having always been a devout Catholic with deep ties to the church, specifically Bay View's Immaculate Conception parish.³²⁵ The publication of Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* in 1891 marked the establishment of a Catholic social doctrine which rejected both socialism and unrestrained capitalism and called for a society based on the honest collaboration of capital and labor;

³²⁴ Chybowski, 69-70.

³²⁵ Ibid., 50-51.

the publication of Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno* in 1931 reaffirmed and elaborated this doctrine for the Depression era, arguing that private property ought to be upheld but subordinated to some notion of the common good.³²⁶

Brzek's commitment to cooperative labor relations thus had a strong moral, not simply pragmatic, basis. The honesty that his friends and the press admired him for was of that particular sort suggested in the phrase "a fair day's wage for a fair day's work".³²⁷ Wildcat strikes were not only counterproductive, but dishonest – tantamount to breaking one's word. There was little moral separation between such underhanded tactics and outright pilferage of cargo, which he also sought to totally abolish, and for similar reasons. Neither did he fail to upbraid employers when he believed they acted in bad faith. He was always suspicious, for example, of the Terminal Storage Company, whom he had identified as a particularly dishonest employer and compared them unfavorably to their other counterparts on the docks. In 1947, Brzek wrote a history of the local's relationship to the company going back to 1941, outlining in copious detail the company's every infraction and the local's attempts at redress. If he never read the encyclicals himself, he nevertheless was a faithful carrier of Catholic social doctrine.

The papal encyclicals were unfortunately less successful in moderating the avarice of capitalists than they were in cultivating antiradicalism among working-class parishioners, and their practical effect

³²⁶ Seaton, 31-32, 43.

³²⁷ The left wing of the labor movement had long criticized this old slogan, naturally. The preamble of the IWW constitution, adopted in 1905, reads: "Instead of the conservative motto, 'A fair day's wage for a fair day's work,' we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, 'Abolition of the wage system.'" Frederick Engels (1881) attacked the same slogan a generation earlier in the pages of *The Labour Standard*, arguing that it was a "very peculiar sort of fairness" that "the workman gives as much, the Capitalist gives as little, as the nature of the bargain will admit".

was to help sustain a tradition of opposition to socialism and communism in the labor movement.³²⁸

Brzek reflected this antiradicalism as well. In the formal charges he wrote after the expulsions took place, he thought it sufficient merely to mention mere personal beliefs or membership in Popular Front organizations as grounds: "Toliver had gone to the Conference on Social Legislation prior to the time the Union sent delegates to it.... Dave Altman is a member of the [American] Youth Congress which is a part of [the Conference on] Social Legislation.... Scott Watson believed in a form of government other than that of the US, and aggitated [sic] on the job the benefits of this government.... He is a member of the Youth Congress same as Altman".³²⁹

Between the decision not to blackball the expelled men and the amicable personal relationship he maintained with Toliver, his former mentor, it might seem at first like Brzek's invocation of the communist threat was just an expedient measure to win a political fight rather than a genuine ideological commitment. But the record of Brzek's activities after the expulsions paints a very different picture. In response to a rumor, later dispelled, that a fire on a ship requisitioned for use by the Navy had been the result of sabotage, one of Brzek's first acts as the new leader of the local was to write a letter to the Navy proposing that Local 815 help to establish a "civilian waterfront patrol" to watch for suspicious activity in the port. Eventually he met with a representative from Naval Intelligence who

³²⁸ Indeed, the Catholic Church was the only major organization apart from the Communist Party to act *qua* party in the labor movement, with "cells" – chapters of the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists – established within unions who met and coordinated their activity with leaders outside the union, in this case clergymen rather than party leaders. The principal purpose of these units was to oppose Communist Party influence. The key study on this question has already been cited above regarding more general features of Catholic history in the US: Douglas Seaton, *Catholics and Radicals: The Association of Catholic Trade Unionists and the American Labor Movement* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1981).

³²⁹ ILA 815 Records, Folder 6, Box 9, April 17, 1942. Brzek's reference to the Youth Congress in 1942 is somewhat curious because by then the organization had been leading only a "quasi-existence", as Rawick (1957) put it, for nearly two years, but it is among the least ambiguous examples of Communist domination of an organization in the Popular Front ecosystem (see, e.g., Cohen 1997, 234-37, 302-07, 319-20; Rawick, 371-77). It would have been more straightforward to point to Watson's participation in the Communist Party's own state conferences, for instance, which were reported in the local paper; the May 14, 1938 edition of the *Milwaukee Journal* shows Watson seated onstage behind state chairman Fred Blair.

dismissed Brzek's proposal for a waterfront patrol but, impressed by Brzek's initiative, introduced him to an FBI agent who recruited Brzek to spy on the Milwaukee Communist Party. For the next five years, he attended meetings of the south side branch and various CP events. In the government's case against Claude Lightfoot in 1955, Brzek was the star witness: in 1947 he attended a CP training institute at Lake Ivanhoe in which Lightfoot suggested that a revolutionary struggle may entail "spilling blood".³³⁰

Given the presence of Communist Party members in Local 815, it seems astonishing that Brzek was never discovered, but both confirmed party members, Scott Watson and David Altman, were not in a position to know that Brzek had begun attending CP functions because both had been sent to war.³³¹ The *Sentinel's* 1959 series of articles on Local 815 featured coverage of Brzek's anti-Communist work for the FBI suggested that it was a matter of comical incompetence: "Surely, word of the ouster [of the left from Local 815] and Brzek's role in it must have reached local party headquarters. That it didn't must go down in the annals as one of the most glorious slip-ups in local party history".³³² Brzek offered an alternative theory in his interview with Chybowski. Chybowski writes: "Before he had joined [the Communist Party as an informant], he warned the FBI that if he was seen by Scott Watson...his cover would be broken because Watson could expose him.... Soon after his warning, Watson was drafted into the service. Brzek thinks that Watson's sudden conscription was caused by the FBI".³³³ Whatever the reason for Brzek's success at avoiding detection, he went on to distinguish himself as a highly committed anti-Communist.

³³⁰ "Dock Union's Chief Spied on Reds for Five Years," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 25, 1959, p. 6.

³³¹ Indeed, that Toliver never exposed Brzek's spying suggests that he probably did not know about it, which supports the hypothesis that while he knew and worked with Communists in the labor and unemployed movements, he was not himself a member of the party, Goff's public accusations notwithstanding.

³³² "Spied On Reds," *Sentinel*.

³³³ Chybowski, 63.

The expulsions effectively sidelined radicalism in Local 815 until the Sixties; until then, Brzek faced virtually no challengers, and he did not have to expend much effort on repressing dangerous political agitation on the waterfront. He was thereby free to pursue a positive program of transforming the local into a reliable and responsible partner in the operation and development of the Port of Milwaukee. Unlike Toliver, Brzek did not attempt to get involved in broad-based class projects; rather than deepening the local's connections to the labor movement and other social movements, he worked on improving relations with port employers, officials of the municipal port authority, and state legislators. He sought to impress upon the members of Local 815 that they were members of a community of interest that included port employers and administrators – not that they were members of a broad working class whose interests were fundamentally at odds with their own employers and the whole capitalist class, who therefore needed a political vehicle of their own.

This close collaborative relationship with the port community began very shortly after the start of Brzek's presidency. In 1943, Port Director Harry Brockel ghostwrote letters for Local 815 to send to the Maritime Commission, the Great Lakes Transit Corporation, and the Canada Atlantic Transit Company regarding the resumption of service of package freight liners on the lakes and in the Port of Milwaukee, and "pledg[ing] our cooperation in all ways possible in assuring its successful and efficient operation".³³⁴ Some employers remained difficult or recalcitrant (more on this below), but most were impressed by and pleased with Brzek's leadership. James Gavan, the head of the Morton Salt Company's operations in Milwaukee, wrote to Brzek upon his retirement at the end of 1946: "I want to personally thank you and your fellow officers for the spirit of cooperation which now exists and has existed *particularly since you became President*. I hope that that attitude will continue indefinitely. There have

³³⁴ ILA 815 Records, Folder 4, Box 8, Brockel to Brzek, Nov. 8, 1943; Brzek to Mr. R.B. Teakle, Nov. 23, 1943; Brzek to Mr. T.H. Hoopes, Nov. 23, 1943.

been differences of opinion and there will be differences. Men somehow find it impossible to always see eye to eye but if approached with the proper spirit and a desire to adjust them, their solution will not be too difficult".³³⁵

A 1948 letter from Brzek to Hansen Storage manager William Richardson upon the latter's departure showed that amicable relations could rise to genuine warmth between the labor leader and the employer. Brzek was apologetic about the harsh treatment Richardson and the company had received from Toliver's leadership, effusive in his gratitude, and, perhaps above all, sad to see his friend go: "The news of your leaving...comes to me with great regret, as you have made a friend of me, as well as the members of this Union that knew you. For this reason this letter is addressed to you as a friend.... When you came to work for the Hansen Storage Company, you came to work with a group of men, and Union officials, who where [sic] not too friendly towards your employer, and your every move, statement, and suggestion was scrutinized. There was absenteeism, labor turnover, antagonistic employees. But you have removed all this, and made a friend out of every one of us that knew you.... You have helped us carry our problems to top management, and have helped us obtain better conditions, and made better workers out of the employees, as they knew you would fight for them in their need, therefore they put their faith in you, and what was once an antagonistic crew, became a harmonious group of loyal employees. You deserve every praise that can be given you, as you won them the hard way, and your ability to work with men is magnificent...".³³⁶

Brzek also took the local's collaboration with government institutions well past prior leadership, although much of the credit for the relationship belongs to Harry Brockel, appointed as Port Director in 1942 by Democratic Mayor Carl Zeidler. Brzek's close relationship with Port Director Harry Brockel has

³³⁵ ILA 815 Records, Folder 6, Box 10. Gavan to Brzek, Dec. 30, 1946. Emphasis added.

³³⁶ ILA 815 Records, Folder 6, Box 10. Brzek to Richardson, Dec. 22, 1948.

already been suggested. Indeed, Brockel was an enthusiastic advocate of labor-management cooperation, taking advantage of Brzek's "sense of community responsibility," as the port director put it, to create more opportunities for labor leaders and employers to meet and confer on issues related to the port outside contract negotiations or enforcement. He describes the harbor commissioners' strategy in a letter to port engineer George Sowers: "There is no particular magic to what has been done in Milwaukee.... To reduce our formula to its simplest terms, we have recognized waterfront labor as an essential element in the success of the port; we have secured the participation of labor leadership in port conferences, which in turn has developed the friendly acquaintance and understanding between the management group and the labor group; and finally, when differences of opinion occur, they are handled on a basis of mutual consultation and respect, instead of on a basis of management or government 'talking down' to the longshoremen". The basis of this "mutual consultation and respect" had been built in part by Brockel himself in encouraging longshoremen and employers to bring complaints to him – in other words, he inserted himself as a mediator into labor-management relations.³³⁷ In the end, in addition to a close informal relationship with Brockel, Brzek became a frequent guest of conferences of the Great Lakes Harbors Association, a regular liaison of the Harbor Commission on port labor policy, and a delegate to a state legislative committee on Great Lakes ports.³³⁸

Brzek's reputation, and by extension that of the local, spread. By the end of the next decade, Brzek was celebrated publicly as a model labor leader by the business community, the port authority, and the press. The series of articles by the *Sentinel* in June of 1959 has been mentioned above, and the headlines suggest the overall tenor: "Good Labor Relations Bode Well for Port; Workers, Bosses Share

³³⁷ ILA 815 Records, Folder 6, Box 8. Brockel to Sowers, May 22, 1961.

³³⁸ ILA 815 Records, Folder 4, Box 8, Letter from Daniel Hoan to Brzek, May 23, 1946; Folder 5, Box 8, Letters from Brockel to Brzek, Aug 31 and Sep 3, 1955; Folders 4-5, Box 9, "To all members of the Legislative Council's Committee on the Study of Great Lakes Ports Operation," Dec. 22, 1955.

Optimism", "Dock Worker Doesn't Yearn For 'Old Days'; Ruling Clique Eventually Ousted", "Dockmen Toss Bouquet To [Port Director] Brockel".³³⁹ Just a month before the *Sentinel* ran the series, Brzek had been honored at the annual banquet sponsored by the city's manufacturing and finance capitalist groups, the Milwaukee Association of Commerce and the Milwaukee World Trade Club. That year, in recognition of the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway, the banquet paid special attention to the question of the port and its development. Willis Scholl, executive vice president of the notoriously anti-union Allis-Chalmers Company and chairman of the International Trade Committee of the Association, was the event's main organizer. "It is gratifying," wrote Brockel to the Association's vice president, "to have the kind of understanding between business and labor that was reflected in Mr. Brzek's presence at the dinner, and the fine recognitions which have recently come to him and his local".³⁴⁰

Still, Brzek's conciliatory stance toward employers was motivated by a genuine belief that it was best for the local and the members. He did not receive kickbacks or bribes in exchange for taking a softer line in negotiations, and if none of his correspondences or public statements indicate any attempt to construct a broad, class-wide solidarity, there can be no doubt he was committed to the local and, at least to some extent, to longshoremen's unionism in the Great Lakes. He believed uninterrupted production and harmonious labor-management relations were virtuous, but also believed the strike was sometimes necessary to discipline unvirtuous employers, and to ensure that "honest work" was compensated by "honest pay" -- but its use must also be strictly disciplined by law, morality and, perhaps above all, consideration of the long-term stability of the union itself. Perhaps the nearest Brzek came to Toliver's aggressive style was in his leading of a strike against the Terminal Storage Company in

³³⁹ "Good Labor Relations," *Sentinel*; "Dock Worker Doesn't Yearn," *Sentinel*; "Dockmen Toss Bouquet," *Sentinel*.

³⁴⁰ "Trade Dinner Stars Banker," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 3, 1959, p. 18. ILA 815 Records, Folder 6, Box 8. Brockel to Weisbrod, May 21, 1959.

1947. Even here, Brzek's copious documentation of the grievances and attempts to redress them at the company show that the men endured arbitrary dismissals, harsh treatment, and favoritism from the company for months while he tried whatever he could to *avoid* a strike.³⁴¹

It is in this documentation of the conflict with the Terminal Storage Company that Brzek left behind an account that gives some of the sharpest insight into his own development as a union leader. In a handwritten note concerning the history of the union's relationship with Terminal Storage, he discusses his own time employed at the company from June 1939 to February 1943. In that time – most of which was during Toliver's administration – Brzek notes that the men at the company "were all exceptional good men" who "worked like fools" for the benefit of the employer, competing with one another to see who could unload cars the quickest. The high productivity encouraged the company to pursue layoffs, which they announced Christmas Eve. After this, the men agreed to limit their output; the company reacted with a campaign of harassment and division. A capricious organization of the labor process by managers had men moving suddenly from the heat of the sun on the docks into the cold storage facility, so that the sweat from their bodies would turn to frost as it seeped through their coats, and back again to the heat. Soon, the best workers were quitting the company to take jobs elsewhere on the waterfront, even with loss of pay.³⁴²

Brzek hung on for some time. His own grievances with the company mounted; he thought the company's behavior was petty and spiteful, and counterproductive to its own success. The fewer men who remained were forced to take on the work left behind by the men who quit. In his department, Brzek spent extra time rationalizing the organization of the stock such that what had been in storage the longest would be first to ship out and minimizing the distances workers would have to go to load new

³⁴¹ ILA 815 Records, Folder 7, Box 9.

³⁴² Ibid.

shipments in; he made the department's operation more efficient than it had ever been. Still, management would arbitrarily pull him from his work at unexpected times, forcing him to leave pallets right in the middle of aisles where they would obstruct the work and increase the hazard for other workers. On one occasion in 1942 – while he was vice president, and shortly after the expulsion of the left-wing – he was pulled away from his department to help in cold storage, and led the men to bust the rate that the men had previously agreed to, hoping to quickly get back to his own department. This angered his fellow workers at Terminal Storage and won him no more influence or purchase with the company – finally, he left.³⁴³

He shortly found work at the American Stevedores Company, where he "had the opportunity to handle men on a job" – that is, he worked effectively as a foreman. This company was an operation started by one of the waterfront employers – Nugent, with whom Local 815 had dealt from the beginning – to provide temporary workers to defense plants during the war. Now directly managing teams of men, he worked at a few different companies, notably raising the productivity of packing welding products into train cars at the Harnischfeger Corporation by 25%. His time at American Stevedores compared favorably to his time at Terminal Storage: he felt his leadership qualities were better recognized, he was respected by managers and by the workers he managed, and he could see the fruit of effective cooperation in the increased output. Between his time at Terminal Storage and American Stevedore, he found the philosophy of labor-management cooperation vindicated. "[T]hrough my experience," he wrote, "I found it was to the best advantage of the employer to treat the men fair and get their cooperation, and in this way the greatest amount of production could be achieved".³⁴⁴

Again, though, this was all according to good trade union principles from Brzek's perspective: at

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

Harnischfeger, the local CIO union had a dispute with the company over the latter's policy of paying workers a piece-rate for packing weldrods into boxes after an eight hour shift, rather than paying an overtime hourly wage. When the union asked for help from the temps, Brzek led them in refusing to load the weldrods into the train car. Nugent was dumbfounded as to how a foreman could instigate a strike; Brzek, for his part, "realized that I could not be a company man because I could not follow company policy if I did not agree with it".³⁴⁵

After the waterfront's wave of postwar strikes – besides what turned out to be a bitter defeat at Terminal Storage, the local also waged standard economic strikes after contracts expired with most of the other employers – Brzek's brand of unionism softened employer resistance, isolated the more intransigent bosses, won the goodwill of the municipal port authority, and established stability on the waterfront. He remained the leader of the local until 1973; a rank-and-file rebellion and wildcat strike in 1971 signaled his dwindling authority among the workers, who once again counted a number of radicals among them. His leadership in the Local and the Great Lakes District of the ILA (and IBL) always contained interesting tensions. As a leader in the Great Lakes District, he was an early advocate of establishing district-wide pattern bargaining so that ports would no longer be so easily played off one another by employers – this being the basic condition that ultimately undermined the left's leadership, and which remained a threat to the stability of *any* administration. At the same time, however, he was also a full-throated advocate of Milwaukee port supremacy, and at times attempted to skirt the terms of regional pattern contracts in order to reduce the wage bill at Milwaukee compared to other ports.³⁴⁶ This was, after all, his main strategy for addressing the basic problems faced by the Milwaukee

³⁴⁵ Chybowski, 73.

³⁴⁶ Vrana, 29.

longshoremen: unable to organize the region, he helped to create a competitive port – and ensure the longevity of Local 815 – by giving employers a reliable and efficient workforce.

Chapter 6: The Struggle on the Waterfront I, 1934-38

Up to this point, I have tried to situate the ILA 815 in the broader history of longshoremen's unionism and empirical studies of interracial unity in the labor movement in the United States. In doing so, I have already covered repeatedly the basic contours of the narrative presented more elaborately in this chapter: the history of the local begins, like that of many unions in the Depression era, in a dramatic moment of rank-and-file mobilization with the ethos of participatory democracy that prompted workers to confront the petty despots of their workplaces and demand more tolerable wages and conditions, a right to due process on the job, and greater control over the terms of employment in general. Racism tended to confine the small community of black Milwaukeeans to the least desirable occupations in the city, which meant that a disproportionate number worked as longshoremen; which meant, in turn, that when union agitation began on the waterfront, there were a number of black workers there to spearhead the effort. For the next several years, a militant interracial longshoremen's union threw its weight around on the docks under the leadership of Aaron Toliver. These years were characterized by the establishment of a West Coast-style hiring hall that took away much of employers' disciplinary capacity, dozens of impromptu work stoppages over various grievances, and budding relationships with other social and labor movements in the city. But disunity among ILA locals in the Great Lakes region made it easy for employers to play the locals off one another and make credible threats of disinvesting in a given port, taking the employment with them. When the Great Lakes Transit Company made just such a threat against Local 815, moderates in the union took the opportunity to stage a coup, moving to expel the left-wing in collaboration with the GLTC and the ILA District and International leadership. In this effort, John Brzek took the lead, and he would control the local from 1942 to 1973 during which time it was characterized by genial and cooperative relations with employers, a farsighted

preoccupation with winning legitimacy with the port director and the harbor commission, and a more managerial stance toward its own members.

In addition to this broad outline, previous chapters have established some of the essential background conditions that begin to form an explanation of the rise of militant interracial rank-and-file unionism and the shift to business unionism. Chapters 3 and 4 both dealt with the political and social movement context that may have facilitated interracial solidarity, wherein the small black community issued forth working class leaders who cut their teeth on various projects: organizing with the UNIA and the struggle for a black alderman, entering the predominantly white political party organizations to try to make them vehicles for the pursuit of their own interests as oppressed workers, and joining the emerging movements of the unemployed and the industrial workforce. Chapter 4 also showed that while severe wage inequality within the local may have been a serious problem for maintaining unity in general, wage inequality across racial lines was much less pronounced on the waterfront. With these conditions obtaining, it is no great surprise that interracial solidarity could emerge on the waterfront; that it did is consistent with the research referenced in Chapter 4, especially that of Gerteis and Bonacich. Chapter 5 details the ideological differences between Toliver and Brzek and the very distinct kind of networks in which they attempt to embed Local 815.

I argued in Chapter 2, following Hechter, that group solidarity can be explained at the broadest level in terms of two basic factors: members' extent of dependence on the group for access to the goods that group membership provides, and the group's own capacity to monitor members and punish defection, or its sanctioning capacity. Groups are robust, first, when members are highly dependent on that particular group for whatever it is they need, for whatever reason – because no other group provides that desired good, or because there are no other groups in the social environment that one can easily join, or because one lacks the information about other such groups; and second, when the group

itself has some mechanism for observing the contribution or non-contribution of members and imposing costs on non-contributors. The main benefit of this approach is that it is characterized by simplicity and breadth. With these two basic variables, it is easy to imagine a wide spectrum of outcomes from weak to strong forms of solidarity, with different possible sources of weakness or strength. When it comes to the question at hand, it also clearly does not demand that ideological anti-racism or the pursuit of a clear anti-racist project be a part of the explanation for all forms of interracial solidarity. Such factors may well *enhance* the robustness of the organization; but weak forms of interracial solidarity may simply be the result of black and white workers needing the same group for the same things, and the group's effective inducement of members to pay dues, attend meetings, and otherwise meet the minimum criteria for membership.

In this way it is possible to talk about the "fall" of interracial unionism in Local 815, not in the sense of an outright expulsion of black workers and monopolization of waterfront work by whites, but in the terms suggested throughout this study: the weakening of the commitment to the political project of building an organized interracial working class, and the turn to an organization rooted in the servicing of more narrowly conceived interests. In Chapter 5, the overview of Aaron Toliver and John Brzek demonstrated this shift in the "ruling ideologies," as it were, of Local 815, after Brzek and his faction carried out the operation of "cleaning up" the local of its radical elements.

What has been left out so far is the actual historical account of the struggle on the waterfront between the union and the employers and within the union. It is to this I now turn. First, I situate the case of Local 815 in the broader structure of the lake shipping industry as a whole and in the movement of package freight in particular, expanding on some of the material from Chapter 3 Section 2.6. Below, in Section 1, I describe an industry in secular decline, with the balance of power sharply skewed toward employers, and factors tending to intensify competition among workers across ports. In short, I argue

that the long-term prospects for militant unionism in the region were quite grim anyway, and even more so without serious regional cooperation among locals between ports.

Section 2 describes the struggle on the Great Lakes that sparked the initial organizing efforts to rebuild Local 815. A strike by the ILA-affiliated lake tugmen hit every major port in the region in the summer of 1934, and the first recorded organizing meetings of Milwaukee longshoremen took place, called by strike leaders Joseph Noonan and Thomas Brennan. They directly appealed to the longshoremen – still unorganized, or more likely with small and inchoate organization – to walk out in sympathy with the tugmen, showing the former an uncharacteristically militant (outside the Pacific Coast, anyway) side of the organization. It was at this point that the organization of the longshoremen began in earnest. I argue that this specific local context of the founding of Local 815 – in conjunction with the essentially simultaneous and much more momentous West Coast maritime strike – helped to set it in a radical mold.

Section 3 focuses on the first year, for which there is no internal record, piecing together newspaper reports on early struggles with the employers and the local's rapid spread through the port. There is precious little to draw from here in terms of helping to explain the local's character, but it is included for its descriptive value and the sake of continuity. Sections 4, 5, and 6 constitute the core of the case study, attempting to identify factors *internal* to the union's organization that contribute to an explanation for the rise of an organization characterized by militant interracial working-class consciousness on the waterfront – and an explanation for its dramatic collapse and transformation into one defined by a pro-business, even anti-radical, consciousness.

While taking a roughly chronological form of exposition, these sections are also thematically organized. Section 4 focuses on the period from the start of the local's record in September 1935, to roughly the time the local suffered a bruising loss with the ruling by the AFL to turn over its inland

warehouses to the Teamsters in 1938. Subsections 4.1. and 4.2. respectively identify the “bottom-up” and “top-down” causes of the local’s early militancy, while 4.3. sketches the early signs of political division that would later erupt. Section 5 picks up again in 1938, focusing on the escalation of those divisions into open conflict. In fact, conflicts intensified along several fronts: internally, rising tensions between radicals and anticommunists, and AFL loyalists and CIO supporters; externally, between the local and the Teamsters, the local and the Chicago ILA, and the local and the Great Lakes Transit Corporation. Finally, Section 6 details the expulsions and the organizational reforms undertaken by the new leadership in 1942, and the aftermath and general trajectory of the local after that point.

1. The Great Lakes shipping industry and the Milwaukee waterfront

Well before the reemergence of Local 815, various developments in the Great Lakes shipping economy set the stage for the local’s transformation. The upshot of these developments was to intensify job competition among workers, especially between ports. Three are particularly important: the high centralization of capital, the overall decline of the industry in competition with overland modes of transport, and, to a lesser but still notable degree, mechanization. Together, these features created a long-term erosion of the prospects for workers’ power on the waterfront.

The first feature of class relations in Lakes shipping was the high degree of capital centralization in the package freight business, and how this created monopsony-like conditions in the waterfront labor market. The story of the package freight business on the Great Lakes is mostly the story of a single company – the Great Lakes Transit Corporation (GLTC) of Buffalo, New York. After the passage of the 1916 Panama Canal Act, the GLTC formed as a near-monopoly to buy up the railroad-owned package

freighters that the law required the latter to sell.³⁴⁷ A second, smaller company, the Minnesota-Atlantic Transit Corporation (MATC) of Duluth, gave some competition to GLTC on the major Duluth-Buffalo trade route, but this meant nothing to the Milwaukee or Chicago ports. In any case, GLTC absorbed the much smaller MATC in 1941.³⁴⁸ That year, GLTC maintained three regularly scheduled voyages to Milwaukee every week, requiring the labor of some hundred men in a union with at most a few hundred members. Indeed, the company was the single largest employer of Local 815 members, representing about half of the entire package freight business in the port on its own.³⁴⁹ The Canada-Atlantic Corporation and Canada Steamship Company, as well as tramp boats, provided package freight service as well, but these combined held a smaller fleet than the GLTC, and their trips to the port were less frequent and less regular.³⁵⁰

The second and perhaps most fundamental factor was the general decline of the importance of waterborne trade compared to overland alternatives, especially regarding package freight, but also including commodities like coal and grain. The decline was the result of a combination of causes. One of the most important was the competitive pressure from trucking and all-rail service. Against these alternatives, lake shipping had only the advantage of offering lower shipping rate costs, which was increasingly swamped by its disadvantage of much lower speed. Much of what accounted for the slower movement on the lakes, and the problem most frequently cited by shippers on the disadvantages of water and water-rail routes, was the fact that there were necessarily several more points at which the cargo was handled. Speed was not as important a consideration for bulk cargoes, which are easily

³⁴⁷ Laurent, 74.

³⁴⁸ Daniel O. Fletcher, "The Decline of the Great Lakes Package-Freight Carriers," *Business History Review* 36, no. 4 (1962): 390.

³⁴⁹ "Docks' Status Near Normal," *Milwaukee Journal*, June 5, 1936, p. 3.

³⁵⁰ Fletcher, *A Study of Package Freight Carriers*, 14-27; Milwaukee Board of Harbor Commissioners, *The Port of Milwaukee: Historical, Descriptive, Prospective* (Milwaukee: 1922), 24-25.

stored, but many of the products in the package freight trade were perishable items. Here especially, trucks provided an attractive alternative. The added labor costs of more frequent cargo handling, plus the need for towage out of riverways, also represented a major reduction in the advantage represented by low shipping rate costs. Trucks made especially rapid inroads in the short-haul shipping market, heavily impacting the few shoreline freighters that had provided some employment on shipments from Green Bay, Chicago, and intermediate ports. Finally, trucking and rail had a massive upper hand over lake shipping in that they were year-round, while interlake shipping could only be relied upon for about seven months out of the year.³⁵¹

The shifting geography of commodity production also had a negative impact on lake shipping, again especially on the package freight trade. Sugar refined in the east had once been an important commodity in the west-bound traffic to be unloaded in Milwaukee and Chicago, but the rise of a beet sugar industry in the Midwest after World War I drastically reduced the regional market's imports of cane sugar from eastern refineries. At the same time, the flour milling industry, once centered in Minneapolis and Milwaukee, moved eastward to Buffalo to take advantage of cheaper mill-to-market costs. Milled flour had helped to revive some of the longshoring jobs lost in the latter half of the 19th century in the movement of raw wheat, when the construction of waterfront grain elevators made it a bulk commodity rather than sacked cargo. After the post-WWI relocation of the mills, the wheat would again need to be shipped considerably further, but the grain elevators and bulk steamers were already at hand in the port to handle this movement with a handful of grain trimmers rather than the many more cargo handlers needed for breakbulk.³⁵² Finally, the depletion of the natural supplies of timber

³⁵¹ Fletcher, *A Study of Package Freight Carriers*, 38-55.

³⁵² *Ibid.*; Board of Harbor Commissioners, 21-23.

and ore in the Great Lakes region and the concomitant movement of these industries elsewhere meant that the shipment of much of their products would move to all-rail routes.³⁵³

Thus, while GLTC enjoyed dominance in the package freight trade on the Lakes, they were yesterday's news when it came to the general trade through the Great Lakes industrial region, facing massive pressure from competitors on the rails and the roads. These factors taken together added up to the following general situation: Workers across various ports would have to compete with one another to win over a single employer who provided a significant proportion of the dwindling work that had not yet been mechanized. Workers' dependence on the GLTC meant the company had a considerable strategic advantage against organized workers, and the competition with the overland routes meant that they had little reason to be patient with high labor costs or unreliability. A union prone to making high wage demands and settling grievances through work stoppages would clearly be taking a significant risk.

Third, by the time the Depression came, mechanization had already eliminated much of the work in handling the industry's most important commodities. The unloading of coal, by far the dominant commodity at the Milwaukee port in terms of tonnage, was once done by hand: men down in the hold shoveled coal to be heaved up by men on the deck, and still other men wheeled it down the plank to the dock. By the Thirties, these workers had been gone for a generation, replaced by dockside crane operators. The rising number of self-unloading vessels, first introduced at the turn of the century, continued to reduce the need for any dockside labor in the unloading of bulk commodities at all.³⁵⁴ This tended to increase workers' dependence on the package freight traffic for employment, where they

³⁵³ Vrana, 9.

³⁵⁴ A. H. Jansson, "Shipping Benefits by Development of Self-Unloaders on the Great Lakes," *Marine Engineering and Shipping Review* 41, no. 6 (1936): 318.

were at a sharper disadvantage on account of the extent of capital centralization in the industry, as just suggested. Indeed, the imposition of such labor-saving technology spelled hardship for longshoremen all over the country, but the reduced labor demand for bulk cargo was felt especially sharply on the Lakes, which were much more dependent on the bulk commodities trade relative to the other regions.³⁵⁵ It might be said that the impact on Local 815 was much more indirect, since workers at Milwaukee's riverfront coal facilities were organized under another union. This is true to an extent, but self-unloaders also reduced the need for workers in the unloading of ore, gypsum, cement, and other commodities that the longshoremen of 815 did handle.³⁵⁶

In addition, the rising use of the tractor trailer and, a bit later, palletization and the forklift, further reduced the need for workers on the docks, especially truckers.³⁵⁷ An industry journal praised the tractor trailer's impact in the Thirties: "...[A] heavily loaded trailer can be started on a very poor floor only by the utilization of an excessive number of men. It is here that tractors are utilized to advantage. The length of the haul is of little consideration, the important fact is that a tractor will start a heavily loaded trailer in motion at a good speed with the use of a tractor driver and one helper, as compared with three to eight men if hand power only is utilized. In some operations tractors and trailers are

³⁵⁵ Direct comparison is difficult because the government reports do not disaggregate cargo types in the tables comparing the grand regional divisions (Atlantic, Gulf, Pacific, Great Lakes). A rough measure will suffice here. Package freight carries a much higher dollar value per ton than bulk cargo; one optimistic estimate for 1937 suggests that, while package freight only represented 3% of the Lakes' traffic in terms of tonnage, it accounted for 36% of the value of the total traffic (Jansson 1937, 433). Assuming that this imbalance between bulk and package freight roughly holds across regions, calculating and comparing total tonnage/value ratios can give us an impression of the mix of commodities handled in the big regional divisions. The ratio (T/V x 100) tells us how many tons of traffic were needed to generate \$100 on average over a year. The greater the reliance on bulk cargo, the higher the figure. In 1937, Great Lakes ports generated \$100 for every 8 tons of traffic; the Gulf, 4; the Pacific, 2.7, the Atlantic, only 1.6. Figures based on those reported by U.S. Army, *Report of the Chief of Engineers, Part 2: Commercial Statistics* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1938): 5.

³⁵⁶ U.S. Board of Engineers for Rivers and Harbors, War Department, *Transportation on the Great Lakes* (Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 1937, revised 1937): 40-41. The local's handling of such commodities is attested in their records relating to workplace safety conditions; see, e.g., contracts in ILA Records, Folder 19, Box 13.

³⁵⁷ In this context "trucker" refers to the operator of a two-wheeled hand truck.

economical for over 90 percent of the work". The same author articulated with admirable concision the fundamental principle of capitalist competition as applied to the shipping industry: "Economy in cargo handling is obtained by not handling it".³⁵⁸ The membership of Local 815 was discussing how to handle the tractor trailer work as early as 1936.³⁵⁹

The class relations in the Great Lakes shipping industry as a whole thus made for a largely unfavorable situation for longshoremen. Dwindling opportunities for employment, especially for those engaged in the package freight trade, intensified job competition between workers across ports. For Milwaukee workers, the stiffest competition came, naturally, from the Chicago port. The overwhelming importance of a single employer meant it was easy for capital to provoke such competition across ports by simply threatening to shift service to the competitor port whenever workers demanded too much. The general industry-level competition with overland shipping meant that high labor costs were not merely a cynical excuse for shippers, but one of the central disadvantages they faced; indeed, when the conflict between Local 815 and the GLTC came to a head in 1942, the company had already been operating at a loss for eight years.³⁶⁰ For their part, owners of port capital, not least municipal governments, competed among themselves to try to offer facilities that reduced lake shipping's competitive disadvantages. This usually meant dredging deeper drafts for ships, improving railway and highway connections, offering outer harbor facilities not requiring the use of tugs or wait time at bridges, but it also meant capital investments in the most updated, fastest, and often least labor-intensive technology for loading and unloading vessels. Workers themselves – at least, those who would avoid the layoffs – could stand to benefit from such investment in labor-saving facility upgrades, at least

³⁵⁸ H.E. Stocker, "Cargo Handling: Economics of Tractor Trailer Operation," *Marine Engineering and Shipping Review* 41, no. 6 (1936): 333.

³⁵⁹ ILA 815 Records, Volume 2, Box 1, October 16, 1936.

³⁶⁰ Fletcher, *A Study of Package Freight Carriers*, 30-31.

relative to the alternative of the ships skipping over the port altogether. Workers thus had contradictory interests in two ways: they had to trade off wage and work intensity demands for better employment opportunities, and had to trade off the possibility of more widespread employment for that of more reliable employment. Both would lay the groundwork for the instability of Aaron Toliver's class-conscious form of waterfront unionism, and the success, on its own terms, of John Brzek's highly "port-conscious" form.

Of course, this account of the class structure of the Great Lakes shipping industry should not be taken as suggesting that what would play out with Local 815 was absolutely necessary or inevitable; a crucial piece of the determination of the class structure is how it is transformed by the class struggle, or put another way, how organized workers intervene to affect the class structure. The tendencies toward competition among workers on the lakes would have been far less pronounced if the longshoremen had succeeded in establishing region-wide bargaining, or even any serious multi-port coordination on any level. Chapter 3 discusses some of the organizational reasons that they failed to do this; indeed, the question of contract standardization was not even seriously raised until 1960. What obtained instead was a chaotic tangle of unequal wage rates and working conditions from one port to the next as each local attempted to navigate the tradeoffs on its own, occasionally escalating in outright suspicion and hostility between locals at different ports.

2. The Great Lakes Maritime Strikes of 1934: ILA Local 815 is born

These conditions would ultimately prove to be a major Achilles' heel for the project of militant unionism on the waterfront, but these were developments happening, for the most part, "behind the backs" of the longshoremen of the Thirties. Only when the conflict came to ahead would they seem to assert themselves as determinants of class formation on the waterfront. For one, the longshoremen did not

usually deal directly with the GLTC or the vessel owners – a major reprieve, given the latter’s strong organization into the LCA and that organization’s fanatical hostility to organized labor. They dealt instead with several stevedoring and warehouse firms who were disorganized among themselves. Some of them were just as hostile to labor, and had contributed to the destruction of workers’ organization on the docks in the previous decade, but they did not enjoy the same kind of strategic advantage as the GLTC.

In the late spring of 1934, however, the organization of longshoremen was still nascent at best, and it was a strike by other workers in the lake shipping business that helped spur them on. Beginning on May 17 of that year – just a week after the start of the general waterfront strike on the West Coast – tugboat firemen, linemen, engineers, and captains employed by the Great Lakes Towing Company walked out in Buffalo demanding a reduction in the workday from twelve to eight hours with no reduction in pay for engineers and captains and a dollar hourly increase for firemen and linemen – in fact a return to the 1929 wage scale – and a guarantee of one day off per week. Within days, the action spread to several other major ports on the lakes, especially Cleveland and Erie. The matter quieted briefly when the parties went to arbitration, but tugboat men walked out again on June 1 after negotiations broke down when the arbitrator rejected the unions’ demands. Two thousand tugmen walked out at every major port on the Lakes, except one. The outlier was Milwaukee, where the tugs were not owned by Great Lakes Towing, but by a smaller independent outfit. The Milwaukee locals of the Licensed Tugmen’s Protective Association and the Tug Firemen and Linemen’s Protective Association – both ILA affiliates – defied LTPA president (and ILA Great Lakes District secretary) Joseph Noonan’s

directive to strike in sympathy until he came to Milwaukee himself to explain why they should. He did, and on Monday, June 4, the Milwaukee tugmen joined the strike.³⁶¹

Indeed, nearly all the trade unions in the industry were advancing aggressively. The International Seamen's Union was also in the middle of a massive membership drive; the same day Noonan was in Milwaukee entreating his members to walk out in sympathy, ISU vice president Ivan Hunter was there negotiating a contract with the Pere Marquette Line Steamers Company with full backing by the membership to call a strike that would halt service of several Wisconsin-Michigan passenger steamers. Five hundred longshoremen in Chicago – already organized by the ILA – had also voted to authorize a strike that day. Negotiations broke down in both cases, and both groups struck on Wednesday, June 6. Milwaukee longshoremen must have been getting quite the crash course: the tugmen's strike was gumming up shipping in the port, with vessels either stuck or going clumsily backward down the rivers without tugs as city traffic piled up at the drawbridges; passenger ships they had loaded and unloaded countless times sat idle in the harbor, their union crews fraternizing on the longshoremen's docks; and their own organized counterparts in Chicago showing what was possible. The *Journal* struck a perhaps exceedingly optimistic tone on Monday when they reported that "no similar trouble is expected among Milwaukee stevedores [i.e., longshoremen], most of whom are not members of any union". On Wednesday, Herman Seide, general secretary of the Milwaukee Federated Trades Council, announced that a mass meeting would be held at Harmonie Hall on Sunday, June 10, to

³⁶¹ All *Milwaukee Journal*, 1934: "Strike of Tugmen Confined to Buffalo," May 17, p. 3; "Lake Tugmen's Strike Spreading," May 18, p. 2; "Tugmen's Strike on Lakes Halted," May 19, p. 11; "Tugmen Quit at Lake Ports," June 1, p. 21; "Tug Strike Ordered Here; Hangs on Vote," June 2, p. 1; "Tugmen Still at Work; May Call Strike Today," June 3, p. 15; "Tugboat Strike May Extend to All Lake Ships," June 4, p. 1.

begin a determined effort to organize the longshoremen; Noonan, leader of the tug strike, would attend the meeting to personally make the appeal.³⁶²

On June 16, all the striking tugmen on Lake Erie held a conference in Cleveland and voted unanimously to ask the organized longshoremen in some fifty ports to strike in sympathy with the LTPA and TFLPA demands; on July 1, ILA president Joe Ryan announced that a poll of the longshoremen “showed sentiment overwhelmingly in favor of joining the tugmen”, but ILA longshoremen in Duluth and Superior had voted on June 29 not to go out in sympathy. As late as June 25, the tugmen held firm, with the Milwaukee tugmen the only local to accept the arbitration agreement and end the strike. But it was becoming increasingly clear that the parties were deadlocked and that the company could stand to hold out. George Tomlinson, president of the Great Lakes Towing Co., threatened that he was “unconcerned” whether the tugboats were back in operation before September. The Milwaukee tugmen had never wanted to strike and had repeatedly sought permission from Noonan to return to work on the grounds that they had no conflict with their own employer. On July 10, Noonan confirmed that the tugmen “will not ask” for a sympathy strike from the longshoremen after all, taking the hint from the Duluth and Superior locals – for that matter, perhaps Ryan’s poll had not been as encouraging as he suggested. The papers’ coverage of the strike, frequent and high-placed in June, flagged considerably in July, except to occasionally report that the gridlock continued. That month, the papers’ coverage of the Great Lakes maritime struggles was almost totally eclipsed by coverage of the spread and escalation of the West Coast longshoremen’s strike. Finally, on August 1, Noonan announced the strike was over and ordered the tugmen back to work. Still, despite the Milwaukee stevedores’ contention that any effort to organize their workers was “futile,” the rise of ILA 815 was in motion. We

³⁶² “Tugboat Strike May Extend to All Lake Ships,” *ibid.*; “Marine Strike Spreads Here,” *Milwaukee Journal*, June 6, 1934, p. 1.

cannot know exactly how they felt and what they thought of the stream of dozens of headlines and photographs from San Francisco, San Pedro, Oakland, Seattle, and the other West Coast ports; the reports of the influence of the 'reds', the solidarity from truckers and other workers, the violence from the police and militias, and the fight for the hiring hall. It is difficult to imagine that, in the infancy of their own organization, such stories made no impact.³⁶³

3. Local 815 in its first year

The existing records of Local 815 don't begin until September of 1935, meaning that details of the local's early life are missing for over a year after the local began to organize in earnest in July of 1934. By fall, however, they were back in the papers. On Monday, October 1, the local refused to unload the *Canatco* of the Canada-Atlantic Transit Company for reasons unspecified, and then made a surprise announcement to strike against Wisconsin-Michigan Pere Marquette ships to begin the next morning demanding a doubling of their wages from 37½ cents per hour to 75, plus 93½ for overtime, Sundays, holidays, and nighttime work. Taken off guard, company president J.M. Cleaveland, who told the *Sentinel* that "there was no intimation of a strike at yesterday's meeting [with union representatives]", pleaded with the longshoremen at the open-air strike meeting near the marine terminal building where the Pere Marquette passenger ship docked. Cleaveland initially suggested that a strike would not seriously disrupt operations, explaining that he would simply hire new men at the old rate and, if

³⁶³ All *Milwaukee Journal*, 1934: "Await Word on Tug Peace," June 16, p. 3; "Harbor Strike Spread Urged," June 17, p. 10; "Marine Strike Here Goes On," June 18, p. 3; "Tugmen Vote Against Peace," June 25, p. 15; "Striking Tugmen Again Ask Peace," June 29, p. 21; "Seek to Organize Longshoremen Here," July 1, p. 19; "Tug Strike Peace Not Yet in Sight," July 10, p. 4. All *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 1934: "Hopes Dimmed For Quick End Of Tug Strike," June 18, p. 11; "Tugmen Strike Will Continue," June 25, p. 1; "Tugboat Men Given Orders To End Strike," July 30, p. 1. Of eighty-four articles containing the term "longshoremen" between the two publications in the month of July, only two had to do with the Great Lakes tugmen's strike; the rest were about the West Coast. A total of only six articles about the tugmen's strike ran that month.

necessary, carry his own dock workers with him from Michigan to unload the ship at Milwaukee. When offered to take up the matter of a wage increase with the board of directors and make any agreement retroactive to October 1, the men returned to work, but called a mass meeting for the following night to set a strike deadline. Gathering at the Harmonie Hall tavern, a regular meeting place for many of the city's labor unions, the men voted to call a general port-wide strike in sympathy with the Pere Marquette workers if an agreement was not reached by Monday, October 8. Thomas B. Brennan of Chicago, then working as the lead organizer for Local 815, and Joseph Noonan in his capacity as secretary of the ILA Great Lakes District, began seeking an agreement with all employers that evening. Already, perhaps in view of what must have seemed like a disproportionate strike threat, waterfront employers began to show their disunity, with the DuPuy stevedore firm immediately meeting the union's demands. The others were given until the end of the day on Monday, October 8, to agree to the wage increase or face a strike of all 750 longshoremen employed on the waterfront. The strike was averted after a meeting between the local and the stevedores, the shipping line representatives, and the marine warehouse officials, in which the latter all agreed to present the workers' wage demands to their respective companies' boards of directors; that is to say, in essence, the companies seemed to agree to negotiate with the union in earnest. Ultimately, the men won a more moderate wage increase from Pere Marquette, to 42 cents.³⁶⁴

It is impossible to know whether the local would have succeeded in administering a strike of that size, which would have involved nearly every worker on the waterfront not including coal handlers

³⁶⁴ "Longshoremen Here Schedule Strike Today," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 2, 1934, p. 11; "Pere Marquette Longshoremen Go On Strike," *Neenah News-Record*, October 2, 1924, p. 1. All *Milwaukee Journal*, 1934: "Harbor Strike Is in Suspense, October 2, p. 17; "City Workers Seek a Raise," October 3, p. 4; "Rhea Strikers Picket Store," October 8, p. 3; "Court Blocks Store Pickets," October 9, p. 3. "Dock Workers' Strike Is Brief," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 16, 1935, p. 15.

and grain trimmers, who had separate locals.³⁶⁵ The simple geography of work on the Milwaukee waterfront, in which the longshoremen were scattered across dozens of worksites along miles of riverfront stretching out in three directions from the harbor's mouth, seemed to militate against a quick route to full density for the local.³⁶⁶ John Brzek's testimony confirms, for example, that the local had not yet managed to organize the men working at the Bay View docks to the south, who did not join until the following year. Reports on the strikes tend to suggest that the heart of the local's organizing activity was quite concentrated specifically at the Marine Terminal Building, whose modern warehouse facilities and proximity to the harbor entrance made it one of the port's busiest. Perhaps they knew they had only enough men, and only enough of them organized at key employers, to issue an opening salvo, but not enough to dig their heels in for a battle. The gambit paid off, though, in another way – with the flashy strike having won a moderate wage increase and the start of real negotiations, more waterfront workers took notice and began to flock to the union.³⁶⁷

Whatever the difficulties of organizing posed by the geography of the port and the dispersal of the longshoremen, they had a major advantage in the form of waterfront employers' vulnerability and disorganization. Unlike the vessel owners, stevedores had virtually no organization to speak of whatsoever across the region, and patterns in bargaining suggest that there was not much to speak of

³⁶⁵ The roughly four hundred coal yard workers were affiliated directly to the AFL as FLU 19782, which apparently struggled to stay independent of the Teamsters. The latter organized coal truckers and claimed jurisdiction over the yardmen on industrial grounds, and several other AFL groups who proposed to divide up the yardmen according to trade ("Order of Shift Rouses Union," *Milwaukee Journal*, October 31, 1939, p. 4). Local 815 briefly looked into claiming these workers but nothing ultimately came of it. The grain trimmers belonged to the tiny ILA Local 1395, described as "the most exclusive labor union in Milwaukee", and a "closed corporation of fifteen men" ("Grain Trimmers' Union Trims Its Size to Job," *Milwaukee Journal*, November 6, 1938, p. 10).

³⁶⁶ In 1938 the Port of Milwaukee had a total of seventy-six docks; thirteen were not in use for general lake commerce, and thirty-four were devoted exclusively to the coal trade. Prospective Local 815 members would have worked the remaining twenty-nine docks, plus the various warehouses. No effort had been made by the city to organize the port facilities together spatially in terms of the commodities handled, so even longshoremen working similar cargoes might be dispersed throughout the port. See: Board of Engineers for Rivers and Harbors, *The Port of Milwaukee, Wisconsin*, Lake Series No. 3 (Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 1939), 31-33.

³⁶⁷ "Unions Expect Utility to Act On Offer Soon," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 16, 1934, p. 11.

locally, either: as mentioned, stevedore Stephen DuPuy, who hired men for some of the car ferry work as well as work unloading wood pulp ships, tended to give into demands immediately, putting a quick end to trouble at his own operations. October's spats were quickly settled because the employers could not afford to hold out, notwithstanding the Pere Marquette representative's earlier bluff. Another impromptu strike against the Pere Marquette line in December demonstrated their unfavorable position in even sharper relief. When a hundred longshoremen refused to unload the freighter *Nevada* over the ongoing wage dispute – again demanding a wage increase – the company simply handed over their financial records to the union for inspection, promising they just did not have the revenue to support a wage increase of that size. On March 14 the following year, the local struck Pere Marquette again when the latter proposed a wage cut, forcing the latter to back down; while the iron was hot, they struck again on the 16th, forcing an increase to 50 cents, to remain in force until further negotiations beginning April 1. Cleveland objected that the longshoremen had violated their previous agreement by striking without serving notice; nevertheless, he conceded the increase in the end.³⁶⁸

4. The consolidation of Local 815, 1935-38

Up until this point, the local's history has only been reconstructed from newspaper reports and a few pieces of information from Robert Chykowski's material based on interviews with John Brzek conducted in the mid-Seventies. Starting in the fall of 1935, however, the local's own record begins. With this record it is possible to establish a clearer picture of the internal life of the local. In these years, Local 815 was preoccupied by a few major projects: obtain a hiring hall and work out a fair system of dispatching work gangs; build on the previous year's victory for dock workers and continue to win wage increases;

³⁶⁸ "Dock Workers' Strike Is Brief," *Milwaukee Journal*.

establish and enforce work rules; and expand their reach out from the docks into the warehouses on the waterfront as well as inland. They racked up victories across the board. They won the hiring hall almost straightaway, during the autumn of 1935. In the spring of 1936, they organized one of the largest strikes in the local's history over their wage demands, hitting all the major employers at once and winning higher base wages, a 5-cent premium on top of that for working irregular ships, and a 15-cent premium for night work, Sundays, and holidays except Labor Day, when there would be no work.³⁶⁹ Starting in 1936 and through 1937, they expanded their membership through not only the marine warehouses, but the inland warehouses as well, inching closer toward full coverage of the freight transit industry.

In the following subsections, I want to establish a few of the key features of this early period of growth and expansion. First, the initiative for disruptive tactics were at least as likely to come up from the membership rather than be a policy imposed from the top (4.1.). Second, the local's organization in this period became highly robust as members' dependence on the group deepened and as the local developed highly effective means of monitoring and sanctioning members (4.2.). Third, the first clear connections between the local and the broader left are made during this time, along with the first stirrings of internal political conflict (4.3.). Taken together, sections 4.1. and 4.2. will hopefully help to illuminate how it came to be that a militant interracial formation came to dwell on the Milwaukee waterfront. Section 4.1. demonstrates the presence of a genuine popular orientation toward class-struggle unionism and an organizational structure that allowed it ample expression and flourishing within the local. Section 4.2. shows how the local's leadership built on that organizational structure to

³⁶⁹ All *Milwaukee Journal*, 1936: "400 Stevedores Strike; Package Freighters Idle," May 27, p. 1; "Strike at Docks Is in Deadlock," May 28, p. 1; "Spread of Dock Strike to Other Ports Looms," May 29, p. 11; "Dynamite Is Seized in Ship Strike Here," June 1, p. 1; "Can't Unload, Boat Leaves," June 2, p. 3; "Pulp Is Taken Off Strike List," June 4, p. 3; "Docks' Status Near Normal," June 5, p. 3. All *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 1936: "Parley Fails In Walkout of Stevedores," May 28, p. 1; "Shipping Kept Down By Strike," May 29, p. 9; "Nugent Firm Settles With Dock Strikers," June 4, p. 4.

strengthen its authority, creating an effective system of surveillance and sanctions on membership such that solidarity might be imposed from the top even if its grassroots elements began to weaken.

4.1. Militant from the bottom up: radical impulses in the rank-and-file

In contrast to the later narrative constructed by Brzek and the Milwaukee press, the local was not driven to “irresponsible” disruptive behavior on account of its capture by a small radical clique. Rather, the material recorded in the minutes, not to mention the sheer pace of work stoppages in the first few years, point to a restive membership impatient for improvements to be made in their wages and conditions. To put it in the biographical terms of the previous chapter, and in keeping with the claim laid out in Chapter 2 about the recursive determination of class consciousness and class practices, as much as Aaron Toliver imparted a radical direction to the leadership of the local, he may himself have been radicalized by the early struggles as it consolidated its position on the waterfront.

The early struggle of the car gangs – so-called because they loaded and unloaded the railroad cars that were ferried back and forth across Lake Michigan – is instructive in this regard. This struggle was extremely significant for the development of the local. From the first recorded meeting in September, the members were preoccupied with finding a hiring hall, but kept hitting snags. At the membership meeting on November 5, the business agent reported that they would not be renting the hall they had previously decided upon because they could not afford the repairs. But at a special meeting of the local “called by the members of the car gangs” on November 11, 1935, a motion was made and carried that “the time should be set for both employers [of car gangs, stevedores William J. Nugent and Stephen H. DuPuy] to meet and if they don’t meet, stop working. The date should be set for Thursday, Nov 14, 1935, or Friday, Nov 15, 1935, but within 3 days.” The car gangs also voted to simply refuse to “sweep cars with coal dust and dung in them,” thereby forcing the company to ensure better

conditions in the cars. Although there is no direct record of it, the car gangs evidently met with Nugent on one of those dates, because the business agent reported quite the turnaround on November 19: Nugent had accepted a “working agreement,” under which the hall could be “rented under Nugent’s name”. Not only did they get their hall, but they would not be sweeping dung or coal dust either.³⁷⁰

Nugent contracted for many of the shipping concerns; apart from hiring the gangs for unloading cars on the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad (CMStP&P, or simply “Milwaukee Road”), he operated docks and storage sheds where ships were unloaded on the Menomonee near the rail connections and on Jones Island. He was a major employer on the port, hiring the labor that moved commodities from car to boat and vice versa.³⁷¹ It is unfortunate that there is not more information about the agreement regarding the hall – the union was almost certainly paying the full rent, which it had always planned to do, but they coerced Nugent into sponsoring repairs. On the West Coast, the hiring hall was jointly funded and operated by the union and the employers; it is possible that a similar arrangement was reached between Nugent and Local 815, but this seems unlikely. For one, there is no mention anywhere in the local’s minutes of anything like the employers’ “observers” that were present in the West Coast halls. Secondly, the West Coast arrangement was predicated on a coast-wide federal arbitration agreement between the union and the very well-organized Waterfront Employers’ Association of the Pacific – in other words, employers *jointly* shared the expense of their share of operating the hiring halls as part of an enforceable legal agreement.³⁷² It is highly improbable that one Milwaukee stevedore firm among several, under conditions of stiff market competition, would agree to bear a share of the hall’s cost *alone*, just to settle a contract dispute. Whatever the case, it was probably

³⁷⁰ ILA 815 Records, Volume 1, Box 1, November 5, 11, and 19, 1935; Folder 19, Box 13, DuPuy and Nugent car gang contract, 1936.

³⁷¹ Chybowski, 16.

³⁷² Kimeldorf, *Reds*, 111.

not a very friendly arrangement; Nugent was, and would remain, a frequent target of work stoppages.³⁷³

The car gangs' fight suggests that the willingness to wage strikes over grievances immediately – rather than waiting for contract expiration or long, drawn out talks with the employer – existed as a tendency among the longshoremen from the bottom-up, not simply from the top leadership. The workers of these gangs called the initial meeting, set their own strike deadline, and unilaterally established a work rule without direction from the executive board. Even more to the point, the minutes demonstrate a close relationship between the membership and the leadership. While there is no explicit discussion about the composition of the executive board, it seems that the purpose of the trustee positions was to expand the power of rank-and-file leadership – trustees were usually shop stewards – and implies the possibility that radicalism in the leadership was a genuine, direct reflection of radicalism in the membership. On the first recorded executive board which presided over the car gang dispute, all three of the trustees were stewards who themselves had likely worked in car gangs, and one most certainly did: Charles Miller represented the workers of the Chicago and North Western Railroad (C&NW) car gangs, for whom DuPuy was the labor contractor; Lawrence Barrington was one of two senior stewards at Nugent Contracting, where the conflict was sharpest; Arthur Ruplinger was a steward for workers on the Wisconsin-Michigan line, which ran car ferries for the Pere Marquette railroad.³⁷⁴

While the executive board had the formal power to appoint stewards, these were not mere appointees hand-picked by the top leadership; the local's records show that a steward's appointment was typically either a mere ratification of a vote by the workers whom the steward would represent, or the installment of someone to serve in the interim after a resignation until a vote could be held. Members

³⁷³ Chybowski, 16.

³⁷⁴ ILA 815 Records, Volume 1, Box 1, first page.

also occasionally recalled stewards and got new elections. They did not have to wait until the usual annual officer election to choose stewards.³⁷⁵ The fact that several stewards were black, and not just two or three executive board members, also suggests that the basis of interracial unity extended down into the rank-and-file.³⁷⁶

Indeed, a closer look at the local's steward structure also shows a deliberate policy of building rank-and-file leadership. The steward has many responsibilities: they represent the interests of a group of workers on the job, leading the informal "workaday" negotiations vis-à-vis the foremen in defense of the workers' rights; they enforce the contract and work rules against any attempts by the employer (or the workers) to cut corners, speed up the work, or otherwise violate them; they cultivate solidarity and mediate conflicts among the workers they represent; they transmit the sentiments and concerns of these workers to the union's executive leadership; they are opinion leaders and organizers in their own right, imparting ideas and mentalities to the workers under their charge; and, of course, they ensure that these workers remain members in good standing with the union, which is to say paid up on dues. On top of this – or rather, beneath it all – the steward is an equal part of the work group from the perspective of the job itself, and shares equally in the experience of the work – the same sights and smells, the same pains and pleasures – as those they represent. In short, stewards are the essential link

³⁷⁵ ILA 815 Records, Volume 2, Box 1, May 21, 1936; November 27, December 8, and December 14, 1937. These minutes from 1937, for instance, show the workers at Terminal Storage having Dale Richards removed as steward because they believed he distributed overtime work unfairly. An interim steward, referred to only as "Bro. Kezele", was immediately appointed while the executive board investigated the charge; ultimately the workers chose to keep Kezele.

³⁷⁶ Attested in various entries in the minutes. Complete lists of stewards in the minutes are rare, and mention of stewards by name often is scattered throughout, in connection to specific issues at their respective worksites; and then, their names must be checked against Census data, which cannot be obtained for every man named. In other words, it's spotty. By my count, though, of thirteen total confirmed stewards on the membership lists, five were black – roughly in proportion to the membership as whole. ILA 815 Records, Volumes 1-5, Box 1, 1935-1942.

between union executives and the rank-and-file, and the elementary basis on which rests the moral leadership of the union.³⁷⁷

Typically, a longshoremen's union would aspire to having one steward for every job. Local 815 aimed to have a steward for every *gang*, meaning there may be as many as *three* stewards on a single ship on a given shift. The local also instituted a convention of ranking stewards into "senior" and "junior" status, such that a single steward on a job could have ultimate say. The precise structure of the arrangement is not clear; it sometimes appears, for instance, that there were two senior stewards on a job, perhaps one on ship and the other on the dock. The vice president, at least, also apparently ranked as a senior steward wherever he happened to go whether he was currently on the job or not, as when he was visiting different worksites. Whatever the case, this doubled-up steward system had some practical advantages: for instance, if one steward was out sick or injured, moved to a different waterfront job, or was absent for any other reason, the gang would still have someone acting in the steward's role with prior legitimacy in the gang with good knowledge of the contract. It could also cause problems – as when two senior stewards, both claiming authority over the work, disagreed over some or another course of action. But in terms of its organizational effects, the system spread out access to positions of leadership and influence at the widest level, making it easier especially for younger, newer men to have a taste of shop floor power. Indeed, if the assessment made by ILA international vice president R.A. Walton just after Local 815's expulsions in 1942 is correct, this system was a major contributor to the local's frequent strikes and slowdowns.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁷ Peck, "Introduction." Apart from this unusual stewarding structure, an even more basic way that the leadership maintained a close relationship to the membership was the fact that there were no full-time officers. Some received payment, particularly the business agent, to make up for lost work shifts in the performance of union duties, but all were still working longshoremen. They were all "steward-like," in this respect.

³⁷⁸ ILA 815 Records, Volume 4, Box 1, "Meeting with R.A. Walton. Wis. Hotel.," March 26, 1942.

Indeed, while the local officially organized only one port-wide strike before 1942, stoppages and slowdowns initiated “on the shop floor” targeting particular employers were incredibly frequent. The leadership would often have no idea what triggered the stoppage and would have to send out the business agent to investigate; usually, they backed up the striking members. When the longshoremen working a Wisconsin & Michigan line ship staged a walkout on October 16, 1936, for example, the business agent upbraided the W&M warehousemen for failing to walk out with them. In that case, the company had attempted to hire non-union men for extra work when the longshoremen struck.³⁷⁹

The next month, forty longshoremen sat down and refused to unload the pulp ships at Nugent’s Jones Island dock. They claimed they had been paid only the base wage of 75 cents per hour for twenty-seven hours’ work of unloading explosives from another ship, rather than the 85-cent premium wage for handling such cargo that they had won in the strike just a few months prior. Again, the leadership supported the strikers.³⁸⁰ But they did not always – and no doubt the frequency of such “quickie” strikes would become a major point of contention in the burgeoning factional struggle. When the car gangs working the C&NW cars launched a job action – its precise nature remains ambiguous in the record – vice president Laurence Linstad declared it a “wildcat”, and the business agent and executive board were called upon to investigate.³⁸¹ The executive board ultimately dropped the case, suggesting that the more militant tendency carried more weight on the board.³⁸²

³⁷⁹ ILA 815 Records, Volume 2, Box 1, October 16, 1936.

³⁸⁰ “Out for an Hour, Longshoremen to Parley on Wages,” *Milwaukee Journal*, November 13, p. 1; “Longshoremen’s Union Keeps Up Wage Parley,” November 14, p. 2.

³⁸¹ Linstad’s use of the term “wildcat” is meant to convey his own position that the strike should not be supported by the local. The previous examples of sit-down strikes and walkouts were not exactly wildcats, despite being unplanned by the leadership, because they received retroactive authorization from the latter; Linstad sought specifically to deny such authorization, which would make the strike a wildcat. ILA 815 Records, Volume 2, Box 1, August 11, 1937.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, September 1, 1937.

Unfortunately, there is only record of a handful of these “quickie” strikes, so it is impossible to know just how frequent they were or the typical nature of their demands. Nevertheless, Brzek later claimed that there were no fewer than fifty-four sit-down strikes in the 1938 shipping season alone; if that is at all representative of the general pattern in the local’s first several years, then the number of such strikes was easily in the hundreds by the close of navigation in 1941.³⁸³ Another indicator of the local’s democratic inclinations in the early years is the fact of genuine contests in officer elections, which were held at short, annual intervals. For the quarter-century between 1943 and 1968, John Brzek went unchallenged in any of the offices he held – first president, then business agent, then both business agent and secretary-treasurer. Occasionally one or two people would be called upon to run against him by fellow members, but they always declined the nomination.³⁸⁴ The first recorded election in August 1936, by contrast, saw twenty-three candidates running for ten positions. The tally for the president’s position shows that Toliver, while he carried a clear majority of the members, did not just get a blank check: his two challengers, Frank Tiedt and Stanley Brzek, won a combined total of 132 votes (51 and 81, respectively) to Toliver’s 180. Charles Miller won the vice presidency with 163 votes to two challengers’ combined 129. Business agent Bruno Radaj kept his seat by a somewhat wider margin, 193 to 129. Incumbent secretary-treasurer Husie Colbert actually lost his seat, winning only 138 to Paul Marks’ 176.³⁸⁵ The next year’s election grew to twenty-nine candidates, and twenty-seven in 1938;

³⁸³ “Dock Worker Doesn’t Yearn For ‘Old Days’,” *Milwaukee Journal* (*op. cit.*). The pattern bears a clear similarity to that of the West Coast longshoremen after their attainment of the union-controlled hiring hall, where “more than five hundred job actions...were recorded coastwide in the two-year period following the October award,” i.e., the federal arbitration board’s acceptance of the provision that all job dispatchers were to be selected by the ILA (Kimeldorf, *Reds*, 112).

³⁸⁴ Chybowski, 94.

³⁸⁵ ILA 815 Records, Volume 2 Box 1, July 16 and August 7, 1936.

unfortunately, no vote totals were recorded for these years, but there was a considerable turnover of board personnel in each case.³⁸⁶

The existence of factions – the “decisive proof of [union] democracy”, essentially the political parties of the labor movement and good evidence of popular participation in union affairs – is not explicitly attested in the minutes.³⁸⁷ But these early vote totals support Brzek’s claim of factionalism in the local between three groups – a radical faction, which Toliver led and which included the communist members, a black faction, and a “conservative, primarily white” faction.³⁸⁸ The split in the anti-Toliver vote suggests that, at least, the conservative faction had not yet cohered; the vote totals suggest either that the radicals were better organized, that they received considerable support from the black faction in officer elections, or simply that the unorganized sentiments of the longshoremen tended to favor their program.

There is unfortunately none of the direct evidence necessary to determine the nature of the factions – how loose they were, whether they represented permanent or sporadic formations, or how many members took part in factional work. The broader history of the Communist Party in the labor movement, and in particular their penchant for building and sustaining factional groups, gives a little extra weight to the speculation that the radical faction was established earliest and was the most robust. The conservative faction likely began to form mainly in reaction to the influence of the radical faction over the years. Least is known of the black faction. The existence of a black faction is suggested

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, July 8 and August 11, 1937; July 15 and August 22, 1938.

³⁸⁷ Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin, 66.

³⁸⁸ “Conservative, primarily white” is Chybowski’s description of the supporters of Marchwinski in 1939, discussed below in section 4.3., and in general opponents of the Toliver leadership (24). Brzek would have been in this group, which almost certainly would have overlapped with Brzek’s support base in 1942, and at least some of which no doubt supported the elder Brzek in the 1936 election. The use of the term “conservative” should not be read as “politically right-wing,” as there is no evidence for this, but certainly anticommunist and predisposed to seek out more cooperative relations with employers.

directly only in Brzek's testimony; it may have been more an artifact of his prejudicial *perception* that the black workers formed a bloc, simply because they were black, rather than a proper faction organization, i.e., with members who caucused with one another, planned interventions at meetings, and ran its own candidates or endorsed candidates for office. Brzek's language about the factions in general, however, at least gives the impression of real organization: "I didn't belong to any of the *clans*, you know. I would have one group or another group come to me and try to get me to side with them.... There was a black group, then there was the Commies...".³⁸⁹ Newspaper reports of a picket by "Negro members of the longshoremen's union" in solidarity with a strike by the Retail Clerks' union in 1937 also hints at factional organization.³⁹⁰ Speculatively speaking, given the influence of Milwaukee's interesting brand of labor-Garveyism and the ferment of black political activity more broadly, a coherent black faction is not implausible.³⁹¹ Even if these factional groups were somewhat loose and ephemeral, unions with sporadic factions are more likely to be democratic in character, less likely to cede management prerogatives, and to impose stronger pro-worker provisions in agreements with employers compared to unions where no factionalism is present.³⁹²

The membership also occasionally exercised direct control over the distribution of work – the basic source of the local's power – rather than these decisions being the exclusive purview of the

³⁸⁹ Chybowski, 21 (emphasis mine). It is worth noting in passing that Brzek's insistence that he belonged to none of the factions ("clans") suggests that the distinction in his mind was between the factions, on the one hand, and the legitimate union, which was really the conservative faction, on the other.

³⁹⁰ "Yahr-Lange Official's Home Here Is Picketed," *Milwaukee Journal*, July 9, 1937, p. 45; "Home Is Picketed," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, July 10, 1937, p. 6.

³⁹¹ It would also not have been the last expression of black power organization on the Milwaukee waterfront. In 1959, Brzek complained of the rise of another black group causing dissension in the local, a "newly formed colored organization called Muzlims [*sic*]" (Chybowski, 103). Milwaukee was home to the Nation of Islam's Temple No.3 and one of the first cities to have a NOI branch.

³⁹² Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin, see Chapter 6. Indeed, these authors find, somewhat surprisingly, that unions with sporadic factions were even less likely than those with permanent factions to cede management prerogatives, defined as contract clauses explicitly stipulating management's right to hire workers; to discharge workers, even with just cause; and to plan or change the process of production and the manner in which work is carried out.

business agent or executive board. When changing conditions raised new questions about how work would be shared, the membership often took up these questions as a body to determine a policy, as when one of the waterfront employers introduced tractor trailers on his dock in 1936. After “a lot of discussion on who has the right to handle this trailer work,” the membership voted that the general longshoremen get it, that the company be required to teach at least two of these men to operate the tractors, and that only members of Local 815 can drive them.³⁹³ In 1937, the boat gangs that had been unloading the pulp ships had also been loading the pulp onto railcars where the railroads connected on Jones Island – probably because the car gangs mainly worked closer to the railyards off the Menomonee and its canals, about a mile west – before this work was turned over to the car gangs by vote of the membership that year.³⁹⁴ The membership also voted to share extra work equally between “extra” and regular gangs; then, feeling generous, to give preference to the “extra” men for that work; and then, having thought the better of it, went back again to sharing the extra work equally.³⁹⁵ The democratic control over work allowed longshoremen to display a level of industrial solidarity atypical of Great Lakes AFL maritime unions when, during the ISU’s 1937 strike against the car ferry operators, members of Local 815 gave some of their own jobs to the striking sailors to make up for wages lost during the conflict.³⁹⁶

The union’s minutes also demonstrate the early leadership’s concern with public and open discussion over contract demands among the entire membership, rather than, say, approaching the body with preconceived demands recommended by a negotiating committee. No doubt the similarity of hardships across the waterfront – low wages, the irregularity of work – made this a more plausible

³⁹³ ILA 815 Records, Volume 2 Box 1, October 16, 1936.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, January 4, 1937.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, May 10, May 16, and June 9, 1938.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, May 5, 1937.

approach than in a more complex and differentiated workplace. Still, turning over this responsibility to the membership turned up demands that may have been missed by anyone not intimately familiar with the conditions of work on the waterfront. At a special membership meeting called for the purpose of discussing new demands for the 1937 shipping season, when Toliver “tried to get some of the members on the floor [to] suggest what they wanted,” the first issue members raised was not wages, but the fact that most of the toilets on the docks were unusable. Others raised not wages as such, but the calculation of time worked, calling for a contractual guarantee of “continuous time,” rather than going unpaid for the time that the ship is shifting from dock to dock.³⁹⁷ It is also worth mentioning in this connection a very important pro-worker feature of these contracts,

Finally, membership votes often determined disciplinary policies and questions about the distribution and rewards of authority. This topic is taken up more directly in the next section, so here I will just give the example of the meeting in July 1936, in which the membership made no fewer than three major decisions on these matters: they voted unanimously to encourage turnout for officer elections by levying a \$2 fine on all members who failed to vote; turned down a motion to pay \$30 stipends; and turned down another motion to have dues paid directly at the union’s office, rather than leaving the authority to collect dues in the hands of stewards.³⁹⁸

This picture of the local’s early years is a radical departure from the reputation it eventually got from John Brzek, whose account, of course, was the basis of the story in the Milwaukee press and the only existing secondary source to focus on Local 815 from its Depression-era re-foundation. It should not come as much of a surprise if the chief opponent of the local’s early leadership was not perfectly fair and balanced in his assessment after he took the helm; the purported illegitimacy of the previous

³⁹⁷ Ibid., November 30, 1936.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., Volume 2, Box 1, July 13, 1936.

leadership enhanced the righteousness of his own by comparison. Indeed, the characterization of left-wing union leadership as authoritarian cabals in pursuit of political goals irrelevant to the purview of the union and antithetical to the interests of its members was a contemporary anticommunist refrain, and is a trope in anticommunist US labor historiography.³⁹⁹ To set the record straight is worthwhile in its own right: his characterization of the local's early militancy as inauthentic – merely the reflection of a small clique's pet project rather than a genuine expression of the membership – is not only unfair, but also inconsistent with the record. The local's steward system made for an unusually large layer of rank-and-file leaders; strikes and work stoppages took place largely by the initiative of that rank-and-file, with the executive leadership only backing such actions after they had already begun; voting patterns show not only widespread support for the main representative of the radical faction, but also widespread disagreement and even perhaps incoherence of the factions, undermining any claim that the faction had the local all sewn up; and decisions about the work often left to officials were made instead by direct-democratic methods. The only source for the idea, suggested in characterizations by the press, that the longshoremen initiated strikes and slowdowns for no good reason is again the testimony of John Brzek; as against this view, where reasons for stoppages are noted in the minutes, the workers usually cited non-payment of wages, attempts by employers to hire non-union men, or other violations of the contract.⁴⁰⁰

But apart from these corrections to the local's early history, these observations also serve a more substantial argument: the unity across racial lines displayed by Local 815 was not just a mechanical byproduct of the control over members afforded by the hiring hall (although more on this in the next

³⁹⁹ One of the few comprehensive treatments on the Milwaukee labor movement, Thomas Gavett's (1965) *Development of the Labor Movement in Milwaukee*, is good example.

⁴⁰⁰ E.g., ILA 815 Records, Volume 2, Box 1, May 5, 1937; June 28, 1938; July 13, 1938.

section). Instead, the class struggle on the Milwaukee waterfront offered up a deeper, more genuine form of militant interracial working-class solidarity. Rather than simply tolerating one another on the job, white and black longshoremen deliberated together in a democratic associational context over matters of shared concern (i.e., in Offe and Weisenthal's terms, engaged in a highly dialogical process of interest aggregation), accepted the leadership of men of either racial group on the executive board and among the stewards, and trusted one another to take on the risks of striking during the life of a contract – over and over again – for one another's mutual benefit.⁴⁰¹

With no way to directly access the motivations, inspirations, or dispositions of the rank-and-file workers of the Milwaukee waterfront, the explanation for why Local 815 emerged as a democratic, interracial, militant class-struggle formation has largely to rest on a best guess given what we do know about the situation. To briefly recapitulate: At the most general level, whatever the prejudices of Milwaukee's white population, there was little of the sense of racial threat that would grip the city in the postwar period; the black population was small, relatively isolated, and not growing. Under such conditions, prejudice did not necessarily rule out solidarity at the workplace. Besides which, of course, the general ferment of the period was educational for a great many white workers as well – hundreds of whom joined the Communist Party in Milwaukee and thereby trained in its officially anti-racist politics, and many others of whom were exposed to such politics on the party's periphery or by other left-wing groups. Even for those who never set foot in a party-sponsored lecture, their whiteness – whatever it meant to them – seemed, at least for the time being, to offer no special refuge from the chaos. In other words, the social crisis of the Depression tended to threaten the authority of old divisions.

⁴⁰¹ Offe and Weisenthal, 87, 91, 94, 97-98, 106.

Meanwhile, racist exclusions in the city's manufacturing sector concentrated black workers into less desirable occupations, including longshoring. Such concentrations created critical masses of black workers in these industries by the Thirties, where they formed a basis for the emergence of black leadership when labor organizing burst onto the scene in that decade.⁴⁰² By the mid-Thirties, a number of these black workers had also been exposed to the ideas of, or had directly taken part in, local political struggles in the Sixth Ward with the Socialist-inflected UNIA, whose Milwaukee membership height was in 1934, or with the more pro-worker Republican clubs. Many had also participated in the explosive movement of the unemployed, where a few met the Communist Party; others may have been exposed to the party by the efforts of Ray Hansbrough, already a leading figure on the Milwaukee left with considerable stature in the black community, whose daily classes on unionism and politics helped spread the party's basic message and raise its profile.

When it came to the waterfront, 1934 was a massively educational year: the longshoremen, black and white, watched the great West Coast longshoremen's strike from afar and the Great Lakes tugmen's strike from up close. Both strikes trumpeted the language and imagery of solidarity and demonstrated its utility in practice. Low wages, bull work, hazardous conditions, and the humiliation of the shape-up assured no shortage of grievances, and the West Coast strike in particular showed how, with the hiring hall, workers could begin to take control and work on their own terms. The disorganization and vulnerability of the Milwaukee stevedore firms augured well for such an effort.

⁴⁰² Apart from longshoring, this was apparently the case as well for the city's leather and meatpacking industries, where Joe Ellis and LeRoy Johnson, respectively, led locals of the IFLWU and the PWOC/UPWA. Johnson was also a leading member of the statewide CIO body. In-depth case studies of these unions would be highly valuable, but the records seem even scantier than those of Local 815.

4.2. Running a tight ship: authority and discipline

Apart from this bottom-up wellspring of solidarity, a crucial aspect of the local's consolidation and the success of militant interracial unionism in its early years was the strengthening of formal authority of the organization. In the terms laid out by Michael Hechter and summarized in Chapter 2, Section 2.2, this involved increasing two factors: first, members' *dependence* on the local for something they want; and second, the local's *capacity to monitor and sanction defectors* in its midst. Increasing members' dependence means that there is a greater potential cost of defection; increasing the local's capacity to monitor and sanction defection turns potential costs of defection into actual costs, and distributes them effectively to actually induce compliance.⁴⁰³ In other words, the leaders of the longshoremen could "impose" solidarity, so to speak, from the top.

The local was generally successful in building an organization that could ensure compliance to the local's policies. The first great test of its strength was the port-wide bargaining strike of 1936 mentioned at the beginning of section 4. Starting May 27, Local 815 targeted the all the major employers of longshoremen, tying up vessels in the port and all movement of freight between ships and warehouses. The executive board won the cooperation of all stewards, each of whom was made picket captains and given authority to determine how long each member of their gang would patrol their line; every working member was assessed \$1 to support the strike, including those currently on WPA work.⁴⁰⁴ When employers, still refusing to sign a contract on the new terms, offered to pay the desired wage scale for unloading the ships currently tied up in the port, the local successfully managed to keep any

⁴⁰³ In situations where monitoring is very difficult, for instance, such that the defection, but not the specific defectors, can be detected, group leaders may impose collective punishment. But this is far less effective than targeted sanctions and is unlikely to serve as a stable basis for group solidarity because it punishes the compliant and obliterates their rational motivation to comply just as soon as anyone defects. Only groups characterized by members' abject dependence – a geographically isolated religious cult, perhaps – will be robust to such poorly distributed costs in the long term.

⁴⁰⁴ ILA 815 Records, Volume 2, Box 1, May 25, 1936; June 1, 1936.

men from taking the deal. Rather than pursuing a more militant all-or-nothing tactic of keeping all employers struck until they all signed, the local promptly put men back to work for the companies when they assented to the new terms before the others. The Nicholson-Universal Steamship Company, one of the major automobile carriers, signed a contract on June 1, and saw their vessels efficiently unloaded. When, by June 4, two holdouts, Great Lakes and Canada-Atlantic, threatened to move out of Milwaukee rather than give in to demands, the local held steady, already back at work for Nugent and DuPuy. On June 5, National Terminals and Canada-Atlantic signed. On two occasions there was a possibility of violence: One night, a rumor spread among picketers that strikebreakers had been brought in, but before acting the matter was investigated and it was determined that the men thought to be scabs were working for the Milwaukee Road. At another point, one of the companies did in fact ship in twenty strikebreakers; Toliver went to go speak to these men alone to notify them that a strike was in progress, whereupon they left immediately. Throughout the strike, no disorder whatsoever was reported at the pickets.⁴⁰⁵

Yet such “top-down” solidarity is in danger of being but a ramshackle construction, absent a foundation in the real sentiments and desires for mutuality and fellowship – in general, for “group life” – among the group’s members. Where there are strong, organic social bonds between the members of the group, there exists a sort of dependency that simply cannot be imposed from the top. Here, one relies on the group for access to the essentially *irreplaceable* relationships one has with other individual members and with that community – that is, there is no alternative group in the social environment which can provide access to these relationships. Dependency of this sort will also tend to nurture

⁴⁰⁵ All *Milwaukee Journal*, 1936: “400 Stevedores,” May 27, p. 1; “Strike at Docks,” May 28, p. 1; “Spread of Dock Strike,” May 29, p. 11; “Dynamite Is Seized,” June 1, p. 1; “Can’t Unload,” June 2, p. 3; “Pulp Is Taken Off,” June 4, p. 3; “Docks’ Stats Near Normal,” June 5, p. 3. All *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 1936: “Parley Fails,” May 28, p. 1; “Shipping Kept Down,” May 29, p. 9; “Nugent Firm Settles,” June 4, p. 4; “Shipping Firm May Quit City,” June 5, p. 9.

altruistic preferences among members, a desire to contribute and cooperate with the group, and mutual monitoring and informal sanctioning. In short, this form of solidarity drastically reduces the organizational challenges of ensuring compliance. Feelings of companionship and mutual regard also grease the gears in the process of interest aggregation; it is easier to make concessions on one's own interests for the sake of the collective when that collective includes friends whose personal hardships one knows and understands. Indeed, the best organized labor unions usually attempt to create ample opportunities for members to create such interpersonal relationships in recognition, and the most effective organizers tend to cultivate such relationships at least as much as they emphasize the practical benefits of unionization. Yet it is possible to achieve high degrees of dependence and very efficient monitoring and sanctioning processes even if the group is not close-knit in this way. Indeed, the stability of large, complex groups, or groups with considerable membership turnover as in the case of waterfront workers, would be difficult to imagine if it were not.

For Local 815, by far the most fundamental development in this respect was the establishment of the local's hiring hall in 1935. The hiring hall was the "closed shop" of the waterfront, having the immediate effect of making workers totally dependent on Local 815 for access to work on the docks or in the warehouses it organized – that is, to the extent they successfully enforced the hiring hall system on the employers. With the establishment of the hiring hall, most of the disciplinary power that had once belonged to the employers – most centrally the power to hire and fire – now belonged to the local. The "1934 Generation" may have, for instance, established the norm of racial integration at the grassroots, with a highly mobilized rank-and-file in awe of their own potential and animated by a vision of a unified working class. But if that norm was codified and adequately enforced by the local, new men – those who had not been there to share in the bonds forged in the crucible of those first open battles with employers – would simply have to adjust themselves to those norms or else seek work elsewhere.

Of course, there was only one '34 Generation, and they would soon be outnumbered by new men and finally gone altogether.⁴⁰⁶ In principle there would be nothing to prevent the new men, untouched by the civilizing influence of class struggle, to “grin and bear it” under the old system until it became their time to lead, and then institutionalize less democratic, less solidaristic, and more exclusionary rules and practices. Indeed, this is, in so many words, the transformation that does take place in Local 815 in the Forties – less so regarding the question of racial integration, but certainly as concerns commitments to workers’ power and rank-and-file unionism. The paradoxical result is that one of the same developments that was essential to the success of the local’s early radicalism – the acquisition of control over waterfront labor – later became a condition of its rapid degeneration. But the description of the end of the radical project will be taken up in Section 6 below; here, I want to point out how the consolidation of Local 815’s authority contributed to its early success.

As mentioned, the hiring hall took the disciplinary power of “the sack” away the waterfront bosses. Under the hiring hall system, the local could impose something like the social conditions of full employment on the waterfront, in which “the social position of the boss [was] undermined, and the self-assurance and class-consciousness of the working class [could] grow”.⁴⁰⁷ The result was precisely that

⁴⁰⁶ Kimeldorf (1988), Nelson, and Cole all point out the centrality of the influence of “generations” of men shaped by acute struggle – the '34 Generation in Kimeldorf’s and Nelson’s case – on the character of unions. For Kimeldorf, the long-term divergence in political and organizational practice and ideology between the ILWU and the East Coast ILA is partly explained by the creation – or not – of such generations. The West Coast’s '34 Men contrasts to New York’s “Lost Generation”, which organized no work stoppages and in which the few leaders of anti-Ryan reform efforts were cowed by threats or turned up dead (99-126). Nelson points to crucial variations in the composition of these generations that reminds of the danger of assuming a straightforward connection between radical class struggle and racial inclusiveness: the class consciousness of San Pedro’s '34 Generation did not include blacks, and drove a highly racialized form class formation compared to San Francisco’s much more inclusive pattern (199-20). Cole’s analysis of the dynamic of organization on the Philadelphia waterfront shows how the influence of the Wobbly generation was effectively diluted not only by the natural process, as it were, of turnover and replacement as in Kimeldorf’s case, but by the IWW’s refusal to support Local 8 (128-136), successful inroads made by the ILA (170-72), and perhaps most centrally, outright state repression (85-91). The Milwaukee waterfront’s '34 Generation included a large proportion of black workers, more like the San Francisco and earlier Philadelphia patterns than San Pedro’s.

⁴⁰⁷ Michal Kalecki, “Political Aspects of Full Employment,” *The Political Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (1943): 326.

employers were forced to endure the “on-the-job negotiations” represented by the frequent stoppages and slowdowns. Unlike true full employment, however, the threat of the sack did not disappear, but instead became a disciplinary weapon in the hands of the local. How did they wield it in the early years?

The routine operation of the hiring hall simply involved the assignment of work on the basis of seniority, but the executive board frequently wielded this power on its own for the enforcement of general rules – most importantly, the payment of dues – and also often for individual disciplinary cases. The minutes are replete with members who failed to pay dues, mentioned by name, along with how much they owe, and the date by which they must be paid up if they wish to continue being sent out for work. This sort of motion from September 17, 1935 – even before the local had a physical space for the hiring hall – was typical, if a little harsher than most: “A motion was made that the two [brothers] in the car gang, Evans and Liedt, pay their dues and fines in full or be kicked off the job” – the motion carried.⁴⁰⁸ On May 21, 1936, the executive board decided unanimously to garnish wages for those who were not paid up by May 26, after which date “delinquent members...will have to pay 10% of their wages [to the local] and this will not apply to back dues”.⁴⁰⁹

The executive board used the same sanctioning capacity to enforce general rules, as well, some of which were determined by themselves, others by the membership. Such rules ran the gamut from inducing greater participation in union affairs, preventing work shirking, keeping safe conditions on the docks, maintaining orderly meetings, ensuring a fair distribution of work, and punishing disloyalty: Members would be fined \$1 each time they failed to attend at least one regular meeting per month, and stewards each time they missed an executive board meeting; any member taking extra work without going through the hiring hall was punished by a one-week layoff; smoking on the docks and in

⁴⁰⁸ ILA 815 Records, Volume 1, Box 1, September 17, 1935.

⁴⁰⁹ ILA 815 Records, Volume 2, Box 1, May 21, 1936.

warehouses was strictly disallowed on account of the flammable and explosive materials often handled, and met with removal from work on ammunition ships; disruptions of membership meetings were frequently met with a \$1 fine summarily issued by Toliver, who was president or acting president throughout most this period; members called to appear before the board who failed to do so were to be fined or suspended; any member in good standing failing to vote in officer elections was fined \$2; any member walking off the job without notifying their steward was fined \$5 for the first offense, and \$10 for subsequent offenses; any man refusing to accept steady work was to be the last dispatched from the hall; any quitting a steady gang was to receive a 30 day layoff on the first offense, 60 days on the second; and any member "making a threat to break up this union" was to be "kept out of the hall" for 30 days on the first offense and expelled on the second.⁴¹⁰

With individual disciplinary cases, which usually took the form of "trials" before the board itself, there were no standard, predetermined sanctions. It seems that any member could level formal charges against any other member; these charges were often presented before the membership. Sometimes the membership would make an immediate decision in the case, but usually they would vote to refer the matter to the executive board at a later meeting, pending some investigation. Failure to appear before the executive board *did* come with a standard sanction, usually a fine or suspension. The executive board would assign an advocate for the accused and give them an opportunity to respond to the charges. There is no evidence that there existed any formal constraint on the board's latitude for determining a sanction's severity, but none of the fines exceeded \$15 in these years. Members were disciplined for a wide range of infractions, among the most common being fighting, or the vague charge

⁴¹⁰ ILA 815 Records, Volume 2, Box 1: May 5, May 15, May 21, June 15, July 13, September 3, 1936; July 8, September 14, 1937; April 29, May 26, June 9, 1938; July 13, 1939. See also a typed list of work rules "passed by the Rank and File," inserted into this same volume.

of “causing trouble” or “causing disruption” on the docks. The practice of deferring disciplinary cases to the executive board and of giving the board the authority to set fines seems to have been established the first time the problem of fighting among the men appears in the minutes, and apparently the membership had something like due process in mind. After having first voted to simply fine the men involved \$1 each, the motion was subsequently amended by the membership to read instead that they “shall be called before the executive board for trial and *if found guilty* shall be fined, [with the] fine to be set by [the] executive board.”⁴¹¹

As with the predetermined sanctions, individual disciplinary cases were brought against members for a wide range of purposes. Apart from keeping order on the docks, workers might be disciplined to protect the rights of other workers, uphold work rules, maintain the integrity of a work stoppage, or, again, to punish disloyalty. When nine longshoremen working at the National Terminals dock refused to work with one Orville Phillips, the membership voted for them to be called before the executive board. There, the nine complained that Phillips was “not heavy enough to handle rubber and sugar and other heavy freight” and asked that he be taken off the job, but as the men had been packing rubber four high with only two men to the bale, they were in violation of union work rules. The board ruled in Phillips’ favor and ordered that he would remain on the job, and that the nine would immediately return to work and quit overloading.⁴¹² In another case, Sam Uettre, working in one of Nugent’s warehouses, went back to work during a strike by the boat gang; he was fined \$10 and barred from meetings until it was paid, despite pleading with the board that he had thought the strike had been

⁴¹¹ Ibid., June 15, 1936. My emphasis.

⁴¹² Ibid., December 8, 1937; December 14, 1937. The clearest evidence on this particular work rule comes from a later discussion of contract clauses, establishing “freight weighing 200 lbs or more shall not be piled [*sic*] more than 3 bags high by two men” and that “freight weighing 100 lbs to 200 lbs will be handled by two men and piled no more than three high, and if it be any higher an additional number of men be used” (ibid., January 4 and January 16, 1940).

called off.⁴¹³

The board, therefore, wielded considerable power over the membership, despite what power the rank and file held as described in section 4.1. Between the rank and file and the executive board, of course, were the stewards. The stewards were a key component of the power of the board. The intensive stewarding system spelled out in the previous section, created a distribution of official authority that was both wide and deep. Executive officers could hardly catch members in the act of violating union rules, spread out as they were across over dozens of worksites; stewards, on the other hand, had eyes and ears all over the waterfront. Absenteeism, failure to pay dues, violation of union work rules – all were easily caught by the fact that multiple stewards would be working on a given shift. Stewards, apart from their responsibility to report on members to the executive board and sometimes to the entire membership, were also delegated considerable sanctioning authority quite independently of the board.⁴¹⁴ In short, when anyone got away with anything, it was usually because their steward or the executive board showed mercy, but not because they were undetected.⁴¹⁵

In general, then, these years show the local asserting its authority over the waterfront – which meant, necessarily, over waterfront labor. To impose discipline on the bosses – a number of whom were wont to try to skirt the hiring hall, knock off men early or put foremen to work to lower the wage bill, withhold wages altogether, or otherwise violate agreements they had signed with Local 815 – the union had to be able maintain a credible strike threat at virtually all times. Men who walked out or sat down over such violations had to be backed up by an executive board capable of punishing those failing to

⁴¹³ Ibid., October 6, 1936; October 16, 1936.

⁴¹⁴ E.g., “All men to report immediately when called on jobs, and if not reporting within a reasonable time to be penalized at stewards’ discretion” (Ibid., April 29, 1938).

⁴¹⁵ They often did extend flexibility to members, reversing fines when an adequate excuse was given, putting long due dates on fines, or allowing men back to work even when fines weren’t paid in full by the deadline. Later conservative reformers seemed to criticize previous executive boards for “playing favorites”. See, e.g., ILA 815 Records, Volume 2, Box 1, September 20, 1941.

honor these “quickie” strikes. At the same time, the effectiveness of the strike depends in large part on whether employers can count on good production when they play by the rules. Local 815 thus had to enforce its own work rules, which members frequently violated when they arrived late, left early, failed to show up at all, showed up drunk, fought with their coworkers, or violated the union’s own work safety provisions.

Rather than understanding this as strictly contrary to the local’s bottom-up aspects, however, some of these apparently authoritarian practices must be seen as a necessary condition for participatory democracy in the organization. The most obvious way in which this is true, of course, is that union control over hiring gave rank-and-file workers considerable power on the job to enforce the work rules they had voted on together with their colleagues. Even beyond this, however, a democratic culture was built on the union’s authoritarian capacities. While the notion of levying a fine on union members for causing disturbances at meetings or missing them altogether might seem, on the surface, like a bit of petty authoritarian overreach, the membership meeting was really the only way to bring together an otherwise deeply fragmented and dispersed unit for democratic deliberation. The disorganization of workers imposed by the geography of waterfront capital and the sectionalism between casual and regular workers, warehousemen and longshoremen, and car gangs and boat gangs provided few opportunities for informal associational practices and militated against the formation of a coherent “shop society”.⁴¹⁶ The local had no discernable print culture; the existing record contains no newsletters, not even leaflets, and the minutes contain no mention of either. Treasurers’ notebooks

⁴¹⁶ The concept of the “shop society” and its role as a basis for union strength is described in, e.g., Barbash (1961, 71), whose examples are an auto factory and a theater company. Shop societies may be more or less internally differentiated and more or less coherent. It is perhaps not a coincidence, given the nature of longshore work, that maritime worker-intellectual Stan Weir skips altogether the meso- to macro-level language of the “shop society” and goes straight for the micro-level language of the “informal work group” and even the dyadic “longshore partnership” to describe the informal basis of workers’ power (92, 235).

show no expenditures on printing.⁴¹⁷ One of the only ways, in other words, to disburse information, discuss the problems of waterfront work, and share ideas about their solutions among the entire membership, was simply to get them all in the room. The hiring hall itself, in addition to giving the union an office from which to take requests for gangs from employers and dispatch workers, also served the latent function of establishing a central point at which all the longshoremen, no matter where they worked, would converge.

Various entries in the minutes indicate the incompleteness of the leadership's authority. Occasionally, work rules and the attendant sanctions that had already been ratified by the membership would be put to a vote again the following year, indicating that the enforcement of such rules periodically slackened and needed to be shored up again – this was certainly the case with the fines for missed meetings, which were reiterated whenever attendance ebbed. The independently powerful stewards could also be difficult to rein in, as their legitimacy as rank-and-file leaders made them more difficult to punish.⁴¹⁸ On a number of occasions, for reasons not always clear, the board seemed to go easy on men “convicted” of some infraction – they might impose a fine, but provide an indefinite period in which to pay it, or otherwise allow men to come back to work with hardly any layoff imposed. Such cases may have indicated that the board was concerned about losing legitimacy by seeming too harsh, or that they simply did not always have the stomach for punishing their own when it came to infractions seen as more minor or excusable – those not involving breaking strike discipline or disloyalty, for instance.

⁴¹⁷ ILA 815 Records, Volume 10, Box 4, “Daybook, 1938, Sept. – 1940, March”.

⁴¹⁸ A 1936 spat between Bruno Radaj, business agent, and Hobart Wharton, the black senior steward at Nugent, is telling. Per the minutes' summary of the BA's report: “Bro. Wharton told Bro. Radaj to go to hell. ‘Men at Nugent Co. think I'm a joke when I tell men not to haul over four bags. They laugh at [me] and keep on hauling five barley bags’” (ILA Records, Volume 2, Box 1, October 6, 1936). Wharton received no punishment, neither for disrespect to an executive officer nor for violating work rules.

Nevertheless, characterizations of the local that suggest that the leadership prior to 1942 was lackadaisical about discipline are out of step with the local's internal record, and seem to stem, again, from Brzek's own somewhat self-serving interpretation of the period. Rather, the leadership of Local 815 concentrated a considerable degree of disciplinary power – indeed, to a degree and with fewer constraints that would make many left-wing trade unionists uncomfortable today – and often wielded it against individual members who defected from the union's rules. Between the local's use of its disciplinary machinery to back workers when they walked out or sat down when they had a grievance, administer formal strikes in a disciplined and peaceful way, and to punish workers for bad behavior, the distinction to draw between the local as it was in its pre- and post-1942 phases is not one of chaos versus order, but two orders of a different type.

As for ensuring the stability of a militant interracial order, it is interesting to note the absence of any obvious racial dynamic in either the disturbances or the pattern of discipline meted out to the men. Perhaps this is partly an artifact of the minutes' vagueness – when they note that a man was charged with “making a disturbance” or with “causing trouble”, there was typically no elaboration. Where there is more information – such as the names of the men who were fighting, or the reason for it – it was always two or more white men fighting, and when a reason was given, it was usually over a disagreement about who had accumulated more seniority. Both white and black men faced discipline over nonpayment of dues – indeed, sometimes entire swathes of the membership at once, including stewards, were subject to dues enforcement. Neither is there any indication – Brzek, for instance, never makes such an accusation – that, because the most powerful officer, with the greatest control over the disciplinary apparatus, was a black man, that white members were more frequently the target of discipline. In this regard, as in others, it seems that the waterfront was stably integrated, and that of the various conflicts that played out there, race did not loom large as an axis of division. Still, while the

emergence of Local 815 as a militant interracial union must be partially attributed to the characteristics of its membership, as suggested in subsection 4.1., part of the explanation is as simple as this: the union controlled the men, and a black radical controlled the union. The problem, of course, is that if the local's disciplinary machinery could be used to support and enforce shopfloor militancy, it could also be used to put a stop to it.

4.3. Cracks appear – factions, politics, and the specter of the CIO

The radicals' influence over the union was not uncontested in the early years. As mentioned above, there were at least roughly distinguishable factions, and the signs and portents of more dramatic conflicts were already visible. The local was clearly tending to the political left as early as 1936, with a trickle of guest appearances by left-wing activists at meetings, delegates sent to conventions not immediately associated with the union or conditions on the waterfront, evidence of growing tension on the question of loyalty to the AFL, and an undeniable, though abortive, challenge to Toliver's leadership.

That challenge came early. At the membership meeting on November 2, 1936, four members brought formal charges against the president. The charges were immediately answered with a motion to dismiss them, and to fine those bringing the charges \$5 each. The charges were dismissed, but Toliver ruled the fine out of order; the membership instead called on the executive board to hold a special meeting to decide the fines. At the special meeting on December 14, a member called Dawson, whose "name was on the list for making charges against the president which could not be substantiated," was first to be interviewed by the board. He testified that he did not know anything about his name being added to any list, and that business agent Bruno Radaj, Sam Ransom, and Dave Wright had gone to attorney Max Raskin's office to discuss bringing the charges against Toliver and came back with "a paper with names on it to get the president out of office". The ringleaders were said to be Dick Tiedt and

Joseph Hoffman. By a vote of 14 to 1, Ransom, Wright, Tiedt, and Hoffman were each charged \$15, to be paid before they could return to work next spring, for “proffering charges against the president of Local 815 with malicious intent of breaking down the morale of Local 815”. Thus, the attempt ended in a total rout for the accusers.⁴¹⁹

Unfortunately, the charges themselves were never explicitly named, and so the challengers’ precise motives remain obscure. But there are a few interesting things about the group. Of course, it included one of the local’s most powerful officers, Radaj, who curiously enough was not sanctioned in any way. Second, the group was interracial; Ransom and Wright were both black longshoremen; this was not a case of white members acting on a racial grievance with Toliver. Finally, Tiedt would later find himself on the other side, endorsing an attempt by Toliver and the other militants in 1939 to oust conservative business agent Paul Marchwinski (this episode discussed in section 5 below). Tiedt’s brother Frank had run against Toliver, as well as Stanley Brzek, for president in 1936. If family ties ensured political support, than this attempt on Toliver’s office came not from Brzek’s conservative faction, but a third, perhaps short-lived group.

This was the last obvious case of factional division until 1938, when it reemerged on more obviously political terms; but throughout this early period, three other important trends that would define the destabilizing conflicts faced by the local clearly emerge. These are the increasing identification of the local leadership with the far left, especially groups and causes associated with the Communist Party; growing tension with other parts of the ILA, especially in Chicago; and conflicts with the AFL in Milwaukee.

⁴¹⁹ ILA 815 Records, Volume 2, Box 1, 1936, December 14. Some flexibility was apparently granted to them; by the following summer, Hoffman was working but had still not paid. At a membership meeting in June, he was ordered to “pay his fine and be glad he is not expelled” (ibid., June 3, 1937).

The first indications of the union's political leanings come in 1936, when Carl Hampel and Herbert J. Steffes – Farmer-Labor Progressive Federation candidates for Milwaukee County Sheriff and District Attorney, respectively – addressed the meeting on October 6, followed by Ben Rubin, a Socialist on the FLPF ticket for the Wisconsin Assembly and executive board member of the FTC, on November 2 (incidentally, the same meeting where the anti-Toliver group leveled the charges).⁴²⁰ On November 30, Josephine Nordstrand visited a Local 815 meeting to promote an event in support of the loyalists in the Spanish Civil War. Nordstrand was at that time a member of the FLPF and the Socialist Party – among the most prominent members, along with Meta Berger, to support coalition work with Communists – and the general secretary of the North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy, later identified as a Communist front group. Nordstrand would soon be one of the most high-profile Communist Party leaders in the state.⁴²¹

Neither the FLPF, the electoral fusion spearheaded by Socialists and Progressives, nor the cause of Spanish Republicanism would necessarily have been controversial for the longshoremen at the time. The Milwaukee Socialists were, of course, a mainstream political party locally, while the Progressive Party was the state's standard-bearer for the New Deal coalition and identified with the popular LaFollettes, and various leaders in the Milwaukee AFL were active supporters of the effort. It is harder to say what the longshoremen would have thought about the Spanish question. In both cases, anyway, the

⁴²⁰ Hampel was a member of the Socialist Party and had served as justice of the peace for over a decade by this time. Steffes was one of the founders of the independent Progressive Party after the split with Republicans. Rubin had served a term as a Socialist assemblyman from the 6th district, representing Milwaukee's Sixth Ward, from 1931-33. He narrowly lost the 1932 election to the Democrat, who benefited from Roosevelt's heading the party ticket. In an otherwise poor showing for the FLPF, Rubin won his seat back in 1936. It is worth noting, in connection to this bright spot for the FLPF project, that his seat represented by far more black voters than any other at the time.

⁴²¹ ILA 815 Records, Volume 1, Box 1, October 6, November 2, November 30, 1936; *Ibid.*, Volume 4, Box 1, April 30, 1942; "Spanish Group to Speak Here," *Milwaukee Journal*, November 17, 1936, p. 14; "La Follette's New Party Seen as Threat to Labor," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 13, 1938, p. 30; Mukherji, 25.

minutes offer no insight into the reaction of the longshoremen, and there is no discussion anywhere in the minutes about making any endorsement of FLPF candidates or the Spanish antifascist event.

The local's political leanings became clearer still in 1937, when the membership took clear action to support two organizations: the People's Better Homes League, an all-black housing justice organization founded early that year or perhaps late in 1936 and in which Toliver himself was a leading figure; and the American Youth Congress. After an address from the Better Homes League, Local 815 resolved to send a statement to the FTC affirming their support of its program for the construction of new affordable housing in the in the Sixth and Tenth wards, and later the membership elected delegates to send to Milwaukee's first public housing conference where Toliver attended as a representative of the League.⁴²² The People's Better Homes League was part of the radical flank of the early struggle for public housing, a tenants' defense organization, and a broad civil rights activist group. In 1937, the League forced city attorney Walter Mattison to discipline one of his assistants for the use of an anti-black slur, took part in the city's first public housing conference, picketed a realtor who threatened to evict a black tenant after raising the rent, and organized a protest of the police department's wrongful arrest and eating of a black student.⁴²³ Already by January 1938, the League's founder, Dr. E.E. Thomas, alleged that "communists were filtering into Negro organizations and seizing control" of the League.⁴²⁴

⁴²² ILA 815 Records, Volume 2, Box 1, 1937, March 1, October 16; "Raskin Heads Housing Group," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 17, p. 1.

⁴²³ All *Milwaukee Journal*, 1937: "Negroes to Be Told of 'Slur'," July 23, p. 26; "Police Manhandled Negro Boy, Claim," October 20, p.27; "Pickets Marching at Realty Office," October 29, p. 41. This story forms a little knot: That slur was uttered by Mattison's assistant on the phone to none other than Kenneth Goff, then-organizer for the AYC and Communist Party member, who would later repudiate the party and incriminate Aaron Toliver in his testimony to Wisconsin's "Little Dies" committee, as mentioned above. Goff had called Mattison's office to inquire whether the whites-only Eagles Club could legally refuse to host the American Youth Congress on the grounds that the organization would have black delegates. That the People's Better Homes League was among the first organizations to hear about the incident and initiate a response is a bit of evidence, albeit highly circumstantial, of a personal line of communication between Toliver and local Communist Party members.

⁴²⁴ "Charges Reds Woo Negroes," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, January 14, 1938, p. 15.

The American Youth Congress, on the other hand, was certainly Communist-dominated by 1937, though this would not have been common knowledge at the time. The AYC enjoyed good press and prestige thanks in no small part to the Communists' policy of making the organization a vehicle for supporting the New Deal.⁴²⁵ It was a big year for the Youth Congress, having mobilized four thousand young people to stage a sit-in on the White House lawn that February, demanding and receiving an audience with the president. That July, their conference was held in Milwaukee, opened with a message from Roosevelt and greetings from the First Lady. Local 815's membership voted to accept the recommendation of the executive board to send five delegates to the conference, and to cover their \$5 registration fees plus a \$2 per diem.⁴²⁶

These affiliations were likewise not immediately controversial, as far as can be determined from the minutes. Instead, they would be marshaled in the future by the conservative faction as pieces of supporting evidence for the case against Toliver and his supporters. As early as 1938, rumors would begin to swirl about Toliver's communist leanings. Excessively strong support for the cause of Spanish loyalism became proof of David Altman's subversive tendencies; leadership in local and state AYC bodies proved the same of Scott Watson. These early attempts to orient Local 815 to the causes and projects of the left, in other words, would play into the central stated motives of the anti-Toliver group: the necessity of cleaning up the local of its radical and Communist elements. The other key conflicts emerging in this period were those between the local and the ILA, and between the local and the AFL.

⁴²⁵ George Rawick, *The New Deal and Youth: The Civilian Conservation Corps, The National Youth Administration, and the American Youth Congress* (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1957), 322-334. Rawick characterizes the AYC as led by a "[Young Communist League]-liberal bloc" (331), in which Communists successfully recruited a number of pro-Popular Front and *moderate* Socialists with their pro-Roosevelt line, and effectively sidelined left wingers in the Young People's Socialist League, who had once been partners with the Communists in leading the AYC and argued, to no avail, that the organization should be open to cooperation with anti-New Deal groups.

⁴²⁶ ILA 815 Records, Volume 2, Box 1, July 8, 1937.

When it came to the ILA, Local 815 was not only failing to establish a cooperative relationship with its sister Local 19 in Chicago, but was rather moving backwards on the matter. As early as 1936, the local leadership could complain about Thomas Brennan's "butting in" to the affairs of the Milwaukee longshoremen – the same organizer from Chicago who had helped to organize and lead Local 815 in its first year, who had probably departed no more than eighteen months before. The next summer, tensions with the Chicago group began to escalate to dysfunctional levels. In June, a Brother Bohn made a protest from the floor against accepting *any* transfers from Chicago, while transfers from Duluth-Superior at the same meeting met no such objections. Brother Tom Collins moved that Joe Hurd of Local 19 be accepted to join Local 815 anyway; the motion carried, but only by a narrow margin. Two months later, Local 815 received a communication from Frank Hees, Local 19 secretary. Typically, the body would take a vote to place communications on file, or else to make an immediate reply if necessary; in this case, a motion was made and carried "that this [communication] be placed in [the] waste basket".⁴²⁷ There is no direct evidence as to the relationship between Local 815 and Local 19 in the minutes, but this degree of animosity and the complaint about Brennan's attempts at interference may have indicated the emergence of a factional dynamic *between* these locals, with the Chicago group representing the regional center of ILA power.

⁴²⁷ Ibid., November 30, 1936; June 3, August 11, 1937. I initially suspected that the reticence to accept Local 19 members could have something to do with race – to wit, a white majority membership attempting to slow a rising proportion of black longshoremen in the local. The brother Bohn who called on the local to refuse transfers from Chicago was either George or Gustave Bohn, the latter being Toliver's opponent in the 1941 election and the sitting president during the expulsions; Tom Collins, the man who made the motion to take Joe Hurd, was black, and so was Hurd. But this is insufficient evidence for two reasons. The first is that I have little information about the racial composition of Local 19; it certainly was not an all-black local, as Frank Hees and Thomas Brennan were both white, so it is not clear that transfers from that local would generally have been black longshoremen. The second is that this would not explain the apparent hostility of the whole membership of Local 815 on display in the August meeting.

Finally, a conflict between Local 815 and the rest of the AFL was heating up that would have major consequences for the longshoremen. The matter began with a jurisdictional dispute with Local 200 of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, mainly representing auto truck drivers, who claimed the right to organize the inland warehouses. Starting in 1936, Local 815 had launched a major effort to spread their organization from the docks to all the warehouses in the vicinity of the waterfront, seeing as many of their own employers, in addition to operating dock facilities, were also operators of warehouses. Perhaps no other single issue appears as frequently in the minutes as the effort to organize the warehousemen – initiation ceremonies for new members from the warehouses, the selection of stewards and executive board members to represent the warehouse workers, contract negotiations with warehouse employers, and warehouse strikes. By November of that year, the union had established Local 815A as a semi-independent warehouse unit, and by 1938 had organized all the warehouses in the city.⁴²⁸

Organizing the warehousemen came with its own problems – some of the warehouses already had incipient organizations, and there was controversy among some of them about whether to join Local 815, the grain trimmers' Local 1375, or stay independent; once their hesitation was broken down, there were sometimes quite stiff conflicts over the distribution of the work between the warehousemen and the longshoremen.⁴²⁹ At first, the incursions by the Teamsters, beginning in the summer of 1937, probably helped smooth over the two groups' differences: the warehousemen wanted to stay, many by that time already having won contracts under Local 815; the longshoremen wanted to keep them,

⁴²⁸ Ibid., November 6, 1937; Chybowski, 17.

⁴²⁹ The two groups even picketed one another for an hour near the Wisconsin & Michigan Steamship Company docks, over a disagreement about which group would be responsible for the unloading of freight from trailers onto the warehouse floor. This was a part of the broader dispute about what to do with the new tractor trailers mentioned in section 4.1. ("Officials Quickly End Picketing at Milwaukee Dock," *Milwaukee Journal*, October 16, 1936, p. 2).

knowing they were stronger if they controlled more of the logistical chain and, more basically, organized all rather than a fraction of their bosses' workforces. The local formed a committee to reach out to the Teamsters, producing an "unsatisfactory meeting" in September, after which both unions kept up their work in the inland warehouses.

Finally, on April 2, 1938, Local 200 issued an ultimatum to Local 815 to turn over the inland warehousemen by the 15th. They also filed a formal complaint with the AFL, whereupon president William Green, agreeing with the Teamsters' jurisdictional claim, ordered Local 815 to turn in 815A's charter. Meanwhile, both locals were signing contracts with the inland warehouse employers while the longshoremen awaited an answer from ILA president Joe Ryan about what he was going to do to keep the warehouses. Ryan, too, ultimately "sealed a bargain" with the Teamsters to relinquish the inland warehousemen; 85 members in a unit of 150 workers were lost and several of the waterfront employers' workforces would be divided along the jurisdiction line. The last of the inland warehousemen were given their honorary withdrawal cards by Local 815 on June 9.⁴³⁰

The warehousemen themselves were evidently not pleased. Once Green's announcement came down, there was talk within 815A to secede from the AFL and join the CIO to establish their own jurisdiction. About twenty workers at the Wisconsin Cold Storage warehouse exhausted all their options before eventually accepting Teamster affiliation late in the year: first they joined the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen's Union, which was soon likewise forced by the AFL to drop them; then they appealed to the CIO, who declined to get involved in a preexisting dispute; and lastly they

⁴³⁰ "Manifesto Sent by AFL Union," *Milwaukee Journal*, April 2, 1938, p. 9; Chybowski, p. 17; ILA 815 Records, Volume 2, Box 1, 1938, June 9.

established the independent Refrigerated Warehouse Workers of Wisconsin, before finally joining the truck drivers' union – under the pressure of the closed shop contracts.⁴³¹

The turf battle with the Teamsters was only the most immediately damaging part of larger tensions brewing with the AFL. Local 815 voted to formally affiliate with the Federated Trades Council in December 1936, only to vote to withdraw from the body again in August 1937. The reasons for the withdrawal are not stated explicitly, but it is likely that the longshoremen thought the FTC was unfairly biased against the longshoremen in the dispute over inland warehouses.⁴³² Indeed, by the autumn of 1937 – still months before the AFL forced the local to turn over the warehouses – loyalty to the AFL in general seemed to be on the wane, and a growing interest in the CIO was evident among the longshoremen. At a special meeting of the executive board and the stewards that October, the body passed a motion that “all CIO literature be destroyed”.⁴³³

Yet the local would draw still closer to the CIO – if not on the matter of affiliation, at least in terms of its willingness to cooperate. When the United Shoe Workers (CIO) struck the A.F. Gallun & Sons tannery, citing the company's interference with employees' right to freely choose their own bargaining agent, Local 815 refused to move any freight destined for the company out of the warehouse – mostly the hundreds of bags of highly caustic sodium dichromate used in tanning – one of the local's “obnoxious cargoes”, the handling of which brought premium wages ever since the 1936 strike. After

⁴³¹ All *Milwaukee Journal*, 1938: “Union Pickets Poultry Firms,” May 27, p. 4; “Independent Union Plea Heard by Labor Board,” August 15, p. 21; “Protest Vain; Union Listed,” September 3, p. 3. “Pfister Hotel and 5 Locals Sign Contract,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 20, 1938, p. 5.

⁴³² ILA 815 Records, Volume 2, Box 1, December 7, 1936; June 16, August 11, 1937. The June 16th meeting of the executive board was entirely about the inland warehouse issue and involved a “lengthy discussion” about the FTC before the board voted to continue organizing the warehouses, and the disaffiliation came two months later. The situation never really improved: John Brzek's report on the postwar strike at Terminal Storage, with whom Local 200 also had a contract, notes the lack of cooperation or assistance from the FTC and his belief that the FTC was controlled by the Teamsters (*Ibid.*, Folder 7, Box 9, 1947).

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, Volume 2, Box 1, October 11, 1937.

about a week, the longshoremen's secondary strike threatened to put them in legal trouble after a court issued a writ of replevin to release the cargo. They decided not to fight the case, reasoning that "the strikebound nature of the good was too indirect", but they had signaled a major willingness to support the CIO's organizing efforts.⁴³⁴

The distance between the AFL and Local 815 widened after this show of solidarity with the rival union. In January, president Toliver read out a letter to the membership from the ILA leadership urging the local to "pledge allegiance" to the AFL. When a motion was made and seconded to pledge allegiance, the motion was declared out of order, probably by the president, on the grounds that "it is not compulsory." At the next regular meeting, the members voted to write a letter to AFL president Green pledging their support, not to the AFL, but for the efforts to put an end to the rivalry in the labor movement; immediately afterward, the membership suspended the regular order of business to hear a speaker representing the National Maritime Union-CIO.⁴³⁵

⁴³⁴ ILA Records, Volume 2, Box 1, December 8, 1937; "AFL Help for CIO Revealed in Gallun Case," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, December 16, 1937, p. 16. If Kenneth Goff's testimony is credible, then Aaron Toliver was at least acquainted with Nathan Garfield, who Goff said was at the same 1936 meeting to craft an industrial antiwar strategy. Garfield was head organizer for the United Shoe Workers in Wisconsin and a Communist; in his capacity as organizer he would certainly have been involved with the effort at as large and important a unit as Gallun.

⁴³⁵ ILA 815 Records, Volume 2, Box 1, January 11, February 8, 1938.

Chapter 7: The Struggle on the Waterfront II, 1938-42

1. Lines drawn, 1938-1942

Thus, by the spring of 1938, the die was cast as far as the basic features of the local were concerned. Until the conservative takeover of the local in 1942, it would, more or less, carry on with these same dynamics playing out: a militant membership with considerable power “at the point of production” to punish recalcitrant bosses; a radical leadership with wide authority over members who usually endorsed and underwrote that shopfloor militancy, but also struggled to impose its own discipline on the men; and an undeniable relationship to Milwaukee’s far left political scene, a growing interest in and engagement with the CIO, and a deepening alienation from the AFL and even the ILA. The jurisdictional dispute settled in the Teamsters’ favor, labor was divided under those employers with considerable inland warehousing operations; as for the local, it was boxed into the declining lake shipping business and cut off from the more robust trucking industry.

Because many of the same features as described in section 4 carry on through the early Forties, I will spend less time reiterating the frequent sit-downs and the leadership’s sanctions on membership; the point was to establish these as rather basic, routine aspects of the life of Local 815. Instead, in this section I draw attention to the intensification of the local’s internal factional and political conflicts, its deepening rifts with the AFL, rising anxieties within the local about the loss of waterfront employment, and in particular the major confrontations with the Great Lakes Transit Corporation that spelled serious trouble for the local’s radical faction.

1.1. The forbidden alliance of Local 815 and the NMU, 1938

All these tendencies rose together as an ensemble. As early as January 1938, the prospect of declining waterfront employment was a big enough preoccupation of Local 815 that the executive board formed an ad hoc committee "to inquire what ports our [sic] handling our freight and why". Perhaps it is too precious of a reading, given the nature of meeting minutes, to suggest that the language *our freight* indicates a still essentially competitive posture toward other locals – but it would certainly be consistent given prior and later stances toward the Chicago ILA. It is worth mentioning also that my own initial (plausible, but incorrect) interpretation of the wording in these minutes was that the local wanted to get a better idea of the main destination ports for the cargo they loaded and that, armed with this knowledge, Local 815 leadership thought they could establish a stronger basis for intraregional solidarity. This reading was incorrect; subsequent meetings show the executive board split on the question of whether to ask the stevedores about the slowdown of business, the board caught between the palpable increase in the scarcity of jobs and the fear of showing weakness to the bosses.⁴³⁶

Meanwhile, the Toliver leadership was deepening its associations with the left and the CIO, setting the stage for an intensification of factional conflict within the local. It was right around this time that the local had its first visit from a representative from the National Maritime Union, the CIO's left-wing competitor to the AFL's International Seaman's Union (renamed the Seafarers' International Union, SIU, after October 1938). In June, when a crew member on a Wisconsin-Michigan line was discharged, the longshoremen played the role of the mediator: having representatives present from both the ISU and the NMU present at the meeting, they managed to get the two parties at least to agree that the

⁴³⁶ ILA 815 Records, Volume 2, Box 1, January 4, January 11, January 22, February 8, 1938. Credit where it's due, though: the January 22 minutes also show Local 815 resolving to reach out to the Green Bay local to discuss rates for the coming year. Unfortunately, no record exists of this or any other meeting with other locals about coordinating contract terms. At any rate, records even of any such *attempts* are very sparse.

NMU would give twenty-four hours notice before throwing up any picket line. In August, the longshoremen took part in a more serious confrontation. When a crewmember on the *Arthur Orr* of the Canada Atlantic line was discharged, the union crew struck for his reinstatement, plus higher wages, better onboard living quarters, and recognition as sole bargaining agent; in solidarity, Local 815 refused to work the *Arthur Orr* or other ships operated by the Canada Atlantic Transit Company. Even more than the sympathy strike with the shoe workers, this strike signaled the local's rift with the AFL, seeing as now they supported a rival in their own maritime industry – barely a year after ILA longshoremen struck *against* and even came to blows with NMU sailors on the docks in New York. The NMU was also one of the CIO's "Communist-controlled" unions. Local 815's sympathy strike had a significant impact: their refusal to unload the *Arthur Orr* meant that the *Delwarnic* could not unload at Milwaukee, having to sail down to Chicago to unload its cargo and ship it back to Milwaukee by rail; and the *Canatco*, scheduled to sail for Milwaukee, got tied up in port there. Aaron Toliver even served on the strike negotiating committee alongside James La Gosh, business agent for the striking NMU local, and Meyer Adelman, SWOC district organizer and frequent mention at HUAC trials. The strike was a major victory for the NMU in the Great Lakes – within two days, the company agreed to reinstate the discharged crew member, recognize the NMU as the sole bargaining agent for the twenty-two crewmembers on board the *Arthur Orr*, and to begin bargaining a contract within fifteen days.⁴³⁷

For the leading officer of an AFL affiliate to play such a major role in securing the growth of the CIO in the same industry raised some eyebrows. The ILA was a bit slow to respond, but the AFL took a

⁴³⁷ Ibid., June 28, 1938. All *Milwaukee Journal*: "Seamen Riot, Strike Looms on CIO Front," August 17, 1937 p. 29; "Dock Workers Back Sitdown," August 1, 1938, p. 1; "Dock Sitdown Strike Settled, August 3, 1938, p. 12. "Armed Guards On Freighter," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 2, 1938, p. 1. On Adelman see, e.g., *Investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities in the United States: Hearings Before a Special Committee on Un-American Activities*, House of Representatives, Seventy-fifth Congress, Third Session-Seventy-eighth Congress, Second Session, 1938.

keener interest. Internally, the CIO question probably aggravated the factional divide. In the board elections that summer, conservative Paul Marchwinski was elected president after having served as secretary treasurer. He marked his election with a telling and unusual statement “to the members of Local 815 ILA: It is to be understood that the present board will go on record not to detract from the present contract, and every man in the Local is assured of his job. It is also our desire to work more harmoniously with everyone connected with this organization”. Evidently, the loss of work was already driving a rising concern to abide more closely to the letter of contracts, and there was a growing campaign among a segment of the leadership to promote peace on the waterfront.⁴³⁸

Anyway, that November 10th, presumably on Marchwinski’s invitation, AFL regional director David Sigman and WSFL representative Charles Heymanns paid a visit to the longshoremen’s executive board to discuss the SIU/NMU dispute on the lakes. This time, it was the matter of a direct confrontation between the two organizations: beginning on the 9th, pro-NMU members of the SIU picketed the dock of the Wisconsin-Michigan Steamship Company after the discharge of seventeen members of the crew of the *Nevada* on the grounds that the company had an existing agreement with the SIU, which had a closed shop contract. The NMU claimed that the workers had switched allegiances and sought an election; the SIU maintained that it stood at the ready to replace the striking men. Of nine executive board members present at the meeting, only one – likely Toliver, now on the executive board as a trustee – voted against working the *Nevada*.⁴³⁹

A major confrontation in the local ensued over this question. At the special membership meeting the following day, someone raised a motion that Marchwinski, as well as vice president Edwin

⁴³⁸ ILA 815 Records, Volume 2, Box 1, 1938, September 23.

⁴³⁹ Ibid., November 10, 1938. “Sailors’ Union Pickets Wharf,” *Milwaukee Journal*, November 9, 1938, p. 33; “CIO Sailors’ Union Pickets Dock Here,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, November 10, 1938, p. 3; “Who Is Picketing Steamship Dock?,” *Milwaukee Journal*, November 11, 1938, p. 2.

Evans and trustee Ole Olson turn in their resignation as officers. The motion was ruled out of order by Marchwinski, naturally. The body then argued about whether to allow five CIO members into the meeting, which was not allowed by a procedure the minutes leave unspecified. The membership ultimately voted 118 to 55 to unload the picketed *Nevada*, undermining the pro-CIO insurgency among the sailors – and a clear loss for pro-CIO group among the longshoremen. Another special meeting was held six days later on the 17th, again to deal with the dispute between the sailors’ unions; this time, Heymanns was back, and ILA vice president and Great Lakes District president Simon O’Brien made an appearance to talk sense into the local about the conflict. James La Gosh, the local’s guest a few short months ago, was not allowed to speak at the meeting at all.⁴⁴⁰ But the tide turned back toward a relationship with the NMU the following spring, and seemed to smooth over the factional division. The executive board, with Marchwinski still president, met with the executive board of La Gosh’s local; now, it was the longshoremen throwing up a picket line, and they sought support from the CIO sailors on the *Nevada*. With the shoe on the other foot, the sailors agreed to honor the picket. Whatever Sigman and Heymanns had counseled a few months earlier, the NMU had established itself as a fact on the ground; all the longshoremen, regardless of their factional allegiance, were concerned for their own strikes to conclude successfully, *quickly*, and the support of the sailors would mean not only that cargo would not be unloaded at Milwaukee, but that the ship could not sail on to any other ports for rerouting.⁴⁴¹ To the

⁴⁴⁰ ILA 815 Records, Volume 2, Box 1, November 11, November 19, 1938.

⁴⁴¹ The proposal of an anti-labor law by Assemblyman Mark Catlin (R-Appleton) in February also provided some grounds for collaboration, or so the minutes suggest. The Catlin bill meant to illegalize “stranger” picketing, or any picket of any employer carried out in any context other than a labor dispute between the employer and the union representing that employer’s workers. It passed around March 30, with an amendment extending the anti-picketing provision even further to illegalize even minority pickets, meaning only those pickets were legal which had been authorized by a majority of the relevant union’s membership. An interesting episode in the “shop floor” struggle around the Catlin Act is attested in NLRB Decision and Order *Carpenter Baking Company*, 029 NLRB 60, 60-84 (1941). On Catlin, see also: John P. Frank, “Constitutional Law – Validity of Statues Restricting Picketing and Related Activities,” *Articles by Maurer School of Law Faculty* (1940): 272.

extent there was an anti-CIO bloc on the board, their passions had cooled; the leadership, instead of spurning the CIO outright, voted to send a telegram to the international leadership of the ILA urging that they encourage the AFL to settle their differences with the CIO. Between the local longshoremen and sailors, it was agreed that each group assemble a committee of five each to collectively discuss proposals for cooperation and bring in reports to their respective memberships, and the longshoremen would additionally write letters to all ILA locals in the Great Lakes District urging cooperation in the matter. The five delegates for the ILA side included both Toliver and Marchwinski. At the next meeting, the secretary was instructed to write a letter “inviting” AFL international president William Green to negotiate with the CIO and “iron out their difficulties between the two organizations so that the wage earners in the US will benefit by this conference”. Conditions on the waterfront were such that, whatever diversity of opinion existed among the longshoremen as to the merits of the CIO, few seemed willing to carry water for the AFL’s interest in the rivalry. So long as the NMU sailors were willing to help the ILA longshoremen win their battles with the waterfront bosses, the NMU-SIU conflict was, from the longshoremen’s perspective and at least for the time being, the sailors’ problem.⁴⁴²

1.2. Communists exposed, and the intensification of factionalism, 1939

Yet this reprieve in the local’s factionalism would prove temporary. While the CIO question was cooling off for the local, the Communist question was heating up. To the extent the waterfront had an active nucleus of Communist Party activists, the most important of them were members of the local by 1938.⁴⁴³ Here it is worth offering a brief profile of the two open members of the Communist Party among the longshoremen. Born to Jewish parents in Milwaukee in 1912, David Altman received two

⁴⁴² ILA 815 Records, Volume 2, Box 1, March 3, March 13, 1939.

⁴⁴³ And perhaps earlier – 1938 is simply the first mostly complete membership list available.

years of college education before dropping out to devote himself to the cause of human freedom. His attraction to the Party was rooted fundamentally in his antifascism: in 1935, at the age of 23, he was arrested with a group of demonstrators who gathered to picket Angelo Cerminara – Italy’s consular agent in Milwaukee and an outspoken supporter of Mussolini – to denounce the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. The same year he joined the state board of the Young Communist League. In 1937, he went to Spain to fight with the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion of the International Brigades, seeing some of the bloodiest engagements and most decisive defeats of the war. He returned in December 1938 after the battalion was ordered withdrawn, going back to work at the Great Lakes Transit docks.⁴⁴⁴

Scott Watson was born in 1915 or 16 in Holly Springs, Mississippi; his mother moved him and his sister to Milwaukee by 1930. He attended Lincoln High School, one of only four black boys in his class, and graduated around 1935 – making him one of the most educated men on the waterfront, where the modal longshoreman had not surpassed the 8th grade. The same year, Watson was one of the organizers of a regional convention of the Youth Congress held in St. Paul. Watson’s impetus for activism, like the Youth Congress in general, seemed to come from the peace movement and the disillusionment still lingering from the “war to make the world safe for democracy”.⁴⁴⁵ Alongside representatives of the American League Against War and Fascism and other major antiwar groups, and himself representing the Wisconsin Youth Assembly, he was a featured speaker at demonstrations. By 1938, he was the educational director of Wisconsin’s Young Communist League and worked at the Terminal Storage Company, one of the waterfront’s most hostile employers.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴⁴ All *Milwaukee Journal*: “Well, Sig. Mussolini, Here’s How Some Feel,” October 13, 1935, p. 15. “Home From Spain, Tells of Meeting 15 Milwaukeeans,” July 10, p. 10; “City Looks Good to Boys Back From Spanish War,” December 20, p. 12.

⁴⁴⁵ Rawick, 281.

⁴⁴⁶ All *Milwaukee Journal*: “Youth Congress Urges New Order,” February 11, 1935, p. 9; “Plan Anti-War Speeches at Old Courthouse Park,” May 30, 1935, p. 13; See photo and caption, May 14, 1938, p. 14.

Neither of these men served in the local's leadership at any point, but they were active supporters of the Toliver faction, and their mere association with the Toliver group – rather than any action they took within the local, apparently – would serve as part of the political justification for the later coup. There is no indication in the minutes that they were anything other than model members, which is to say their names are never mentioned in connection to any disciplinary cases or disruptions. Before the expulsions, Altman is mentioned in the minutes only once for making a proposal, which failed, that the members reject an arbitration agreement with the Hansen Storage and National Terminal warehouses in May of 1941. Watson is mentioned only twice, first in 1939 as part of a group pressing charges against Marchwinski in 1939, and second in 1941 for proposing that a committee be set up “to communicate with our members who are in the service and let them know we still remember them”.⁴⁴⁷

This is all that is known of the open Communists among the longshoremen, but there is a much larger story of how the rising tide of anticommunism in 1939 came to affect Local 815. Earlier in the decade and before, Milwaukee Communists had, of course, endured repression – Palmer (and other) raids, deportations, and police red squads were old news. Fred Bassett Blair had run for governor from his cell at the workhouse as early as 1930, convicted of inciting an unemployed riot; indeed, David Altman served twenty days after the picket of Mussolini's agent.⁴⁴⁸ But in 1939 and 1940, Ferrell Schnering, Kenneth Goff, and William Ryan gave testimony to the House Committee on Un-American Activities about the activities of the Communist Party in Milwaukee and Wisconsin, providing months'

⁴⁴⁷ ILA 815 Records: Volume 2, Box 1, November 4, 1939; May 7, 1941; Volume 4, Box 1, October 13, 1941.

Watson's motion was typical of the Communist Party's overt pro-war patriotism after Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June of 1941; his own rapid turnaround from the peace movement to the war mobilization also reflected the Party's dizzying policy shift.

⁴⁴⁸ “Communists Here Quieting Down After a Noisy Career,” *Milwaukee Journal*, September 1, 1940, p. 30; “Mussolini's Foes Convicted Again,” *Milwaukee Journal*, December 11, 1935, p. 14.

worth of sensational reports in the *Journal* and the *Sentinel*. Previously, Communists were depicted, for the most part, as ridiculous, misguided, and disruptive. After the HUAC testimonies, however, the papers presented the local Communist Party as a highly competent fifth column operation who had already cajoled, deceived, and otherwise manipulated their way into powerful positions in the labor movement, liberal organizations, intellectual circles, and the state. In the weeks after Schnering's testimony – he was the first of the three to testify – the state legislature printed five hundred copies of the HUAC proceedings for distribution; three Progressive members felt compelled to publicly respond to allegations that they were Communists on account of their association with the Wisconsin Conference on Social Legislation.⁴⁴⁹

In this paranoid atmosphere it was not long before the rumor mill came to Local 815. In August of 1939, Benjamin Marshman, federal conciliator with the Maritime Labor Board, was in Milwaukee to discuss with the longshoremen (among other reasons, presumably) their concerns about the slowdown in business on the waterfront. Marshman's visit alone aggravated factional resentments; before he met with the general meeting of the longshoremen, he met in private with Marchwinski, now serving as the business agent, and Evans, now the president. It was noted "other board members were resentful" at having not been invited. The minutes are not entirely clear on the precise series of events; either Marshman had heard from Marchwinski and Evans at this earlier private meeting that Toliver was a "communist sympathizer", or he had heard it elsewhere; at any rate, he repeated the rumor in front of the entire membership, wanting to know if it was true that "one of our members is a communist". As Toliver would not be specifically named in the anticommunist trials until Goff's testimony in 1941, I

⁴⁴⁹ All 1939: "Grasp of Reds in State Told," *Milwaukee Journal*, June 9, p. 1; "Ex-Communist Says Reds Rule State CIO," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 10, p. 3; "Charges 'Reds' Forging Ahead in Wisconsin," *Milwaukee Journal*, June 22, p. 28; "Communism Spreading Through State, Assembly Told," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 23, p. 10; "'Red' Charges Rouse Echoes in Madison," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 24, p. 4.

speculate that Marshman heard it direct from Marchwinski and Evans; it is possible, however, that he heard it from other union leaders in the city in the course of his other business. Whatever the case, Toliver denied the charge and felt compelled to present his American Legion membership card; Marchwinski, meanwhile, felt compelled to “plead for peace in our ranks”. Marshman’s main reason for addressing the longshoremen – explaining the declining movement of freight into the port – was hardly more encouraging: “cutthroat competition” and disorganization among contractors across the region was a major reason for the loss of work. The longshoremen had not managed to organize *themselves* throughout the region, and indeed were still even skeptical or worse of the principle. Without their own organization, there was hardly anything they could do about organizing the bosses.⁴⁵⁰

This little dustup seemed to be a turnoff for the membership; the next regular meeting was simply called off for lack of attendance, and the next executive board meeting was concerned principally with getting the stewards to encourage the rank-and-file’s participation. But things otherwise seemed quiet until that fall, when the local endured the biggest factional controversy they would face until 1942. In October, the workers and stewards working at Nugent repeatedly clashed with Marchwinski, who in September left the presidency after being elected business agent (Evans was now president, and Toliver vice president). Dick Tiedt, the same who three years earlier had led the attempt to force Toliver out of leadership, was now a senior steward at Nugent; he, along with junior steward D.E. Crawford, Scott Watson, and Lamon Williams made several charges against Marchwinski to the effect that he was allowing Nugent to circumvent the hiring hall system and otherwise violating the rules of the job rotation, and therefore remiss in his duties as business agent; moreover, he directly contravened the on-the-job authority of the stewards. The conflict is also notable for including the only record of a possible

⁴⁵⁰ ILA 815 Records, Volume 2, Box 1, August 8, August 11, 1939. Toliver’s Legion ID number, No.967625, is even recorded in the minutes, as if to call for confirmation.

charge of racial discrimination in the distribution of work in the early history of the local, that at least half the team bringing the charges were black (Watson and Williams; Tiedt was white, and Crawford's race is unknown), and that the investigating committee put together after the charges were put forward was *explicitly* set up on an interracial basis, with two white and two black members.

The minutes are again somewhat fuzzy on the specifics, but it is clear that there were at least a few separate incidents. The first was the one appearing to involve a possible case of racial discrimination. So that the reader may attempt their own interpretation, I reproduce the record in the minutes verbatim:

Charges were made that 4 [3] men were discharged at 10AM Oct 17, 1939. They were Br. Paul Wilson, Br. R. Pierce, Br. L.V. Scot.
 The 4 [3] man that was nocked of [knocked off] was intitled to a nock of. But the other men was suposed to keep on workeing be cause the job was not complited and paul [Marchwinski] said it was extra car gang worke. After doing so paul sent Wallie Pilak over on the sugar at house 5 and that is Why this Discriminating come about.
 The three men paul nocked of he paid \$2.95 per man. Br. Tiedt told paul that thoes men had to be paid the removal of the Bis agent.⁴⁵¹

This entry seems to say that three regular car gang men – Paul Wilson, Robert Pierce, and Lee Scott, all black – were discharged on a job before it was finished on the grounds that it was *extra* gang work, and then that the business agent sent out Walter Pilak – a white *regular* man – to carry on the job. Despite the three men being compensated, Tiedt argued that just payment could be made only by Marchwinski's resignation.⁴⁵²

This is only the most remarkable of the three or four allegations made by the group. A week or so after this incident, Tiedt ordered his gangs to stop working on the grounds that Nugent had violated the contract in hiring extra men without going through the hiring hall, and instructed the foreman to

⁴⁵¹ Part of the difficulty in interpretation is the ambiguity of the phrasal verb "to knock off", which depending on context can variously mean to be finished with a job, to be discharged from a job, or to engage in a work stoppage. To be "entitled" to a knock off sounds to me like the three men were under the false impression that their work was done, and that what work remained belonged to the extra gang.

⁴⁵² ILA 815 Records, Volume 2, Box 1, November 6, 1939.

pull the gang plank, which he did; when Marchwinski arrived, he told Nugent that it was he, not the steward, who was in charge, and he ordered the men back to work. In general, Tiedt claimed that Nugent was hiring whoever he wanted for extra gangs, that Marchwinski knew about it and did nothing, and that he was incapable of taking care of the various contracts for which he was responsible.⁴⁵³

But the case against Marchwinski largely fell apart at the general meeting on November 7 for reasons not totally clear. Marchwinski's laxness with Nugent may have been motivated in part by deteriorating port economic conditions, and a desire to ensure the union's stability through continued production and something like "gentlemen's agreements" with the employers; when the rank-and-file voted to drop the charges against him, they may have been signaling that they did not currently have the stomach to keep up the low-intensity class warfare that usually typified work on the docks. Instead – and perhaps perceiving that the controversy was largely driven and certainly aggravated by intra-board factionalism *as such* – they passed a resolution setting up an investigating committee of "four men be appointed to check up on the Executive Board, *two colored and two white*", and that "any charges made on any officers shall come through the subcommittee".⁴⁵⁴

On the subcommittee were Bill Lamays and Lamon Williams, black, and Louie Solomon and Leo Johnson, white. Johnson was a part of the left-wing faction and a steadfast Toliver ally; Williams had, of course, been among the four men to bring the charges against Marchwinski in the first place. The committee seemed to make a little bit of noise at the start, for instance investigating "why the president [Edwin Evans] was absent after he instructed us to attend the meetings", and deciding among them that they had the power to call board meetings to bring charges against any member of the board that they saw fit. Yet little became of it; when the investigating committee reported to the board on November

⁴⁵³ Ibid.; also November 4, 1939.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., November 7, 1939.

25, the minutes do not record anything other than the statement that the committee “decided that we should do away with hatred against one another and cooperated together and have harmony in our ranks”. It is never mentioned whether the investigating committee actually found him guilty of wrongdoing, or found that the charges of discrimination against the black car gang workers turned out to be the result of a misunderstanding, or what.⁴⁵⁵ By December the local was preoccupied with preparations for contract bargaining and, perhaps in light of the whole recent dispute, reiterated that the punishment for taking a job without going through the hiring hall would result in a 30-day membership suspension and layoff, and Marchwinski kept his position on the board for the time being.⁴⁵⁶

1.3. Unity in the struggle against the Great Lakes Transit Corporation, 1940-41

Ultimately, though, the factional conflict seemed ended in a narrow victory for the radicals. Marchwinski resigned in May, some four months before his term was up, with the membership voting to accept the resignation 52-37. The investigating subcommittee seemed, in the end, to have pushed for this result, and the main source of the delay might have simply been the difficulty in finding a replacement.

President Evans was asked to take on the role, but he declined on the grounds that “he could not make enough money to feed his family” on the BA’s stipend. Financial secretary Dan Bartell finally agreed to finish out the term, and Marchwinski was off the board. Meanwhile, thanks to Evans’ frequent absences, vice president Toliver was back in his role as acting president for the majority of the period from January to September, when he was elected president outright once again. The uneasy factional balance thus

⁴⁵⁵ A reassertion of the primacy of the principle of seniority was made at the December 4 executive board meeting, the one immediately following the “harmony in our ranks” declaration, but the minutes do not indicate if this had any connection to the Marchwinski controversy. If the discrimination case turned out to be a conflict over seniority and its priority in the determination of the distribution of work, it would not be the last time. See Chybowski, especially 145-147 on Milwaukee civil rights activist and longshoremen Bill Mosby in the early Sixties.

⁴⁵⁶ ILA Records, Volume 2, Box 1, November 7, November 22, November 25, December 4, 1939.

shifted again toward the radicals: having failed to win over the membership to the outright removal of the business agent, an appointed biracial committee had to secure his removal, and that only months later; plus, the radicals' most important figure was informally back at the helm for most of the year and then formally again once elected. With the dust settled on the internal conflict for the moment, the local turned its attention to the next round of contract negotiations.⁴⁵⁷

Relative to the previous two years, 1940 seemed quiet – the minutes, anyway, recount no major internal fights, no big controversies about the CIO, and no whispering about Communists in the midst. All thirteen entries from the beginning of the year on January 4 until April 15 record discussions exclusively concerned with the upcoming contracts. The local held onto previous gains and made a few more in many of the contracts, especially on overtime wage rates, but employers largely refused even to negotiate on an increase in base wages; the warehouse employers at one point simply walked out on the longshoremen's bargaining team when the issue of base wages arose. The negotiations were also marked by the usual, and at least in this case probably credible, threat of lost jobs if the labor costs increased. A postscript to the minutes of a negotiation session with the various boat lines notes that if the men that work the salt boats accept the employers' proposal, "they will bring over 45,000 tons of salt into this port. If refused they will simply ship it by rail".⁴⁵⁸

Contracts were signed in April with no increase to base wages for boat gangs or Hansen Storage Company warehousemen, and a 5-cent increase for warehousemen at the Wisconsin-Michigan and National Terminal houses. Car gangs likewise won no increase on the hourly wage, which was equal to the boat gangs', but they were in a somewhat better position, having won tonnage rate increases and only being paid the hourly wage when working freight that had no tonnage rate set. Of all the members,

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., Volume 2, Box 1, May 10, May 15, September 10, 1940.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., April 3, 1940.

apparently only the eight working at Hansen Storage struck, and with no success.⁴⁵⁹ The leadership was apparently not confident they could win, they believed the employers' case that they simply could not pay, or both; the Hansen situation, at least, seemed to prove them right.

Between the end of negotiations in 1940 and the start of negotiations in 1941, the local in general and its radicals in particular were dealt a very difficult situation. Apart from the relative meekness the local displayed in the 1940 contract cycle by mostly refusing to strike, other signals indicated their uncertainty and fears regarding the economic conditions and their internal political disarray. For instance, in January 1940, the leadership took a much harder line on lost cargo than it ever had, proposing a rule in the local constitution at first suggesting a contract clause stating that "any member who damages cargo or anything of value onboard vessel or dock shall, when proven guilty to the satisfaction of his local, be expelled from the local", before moderating this somewhat to the adoption of the International's rules on damaged cargo. But in the fall, after the radical faction's position stabilized after the Marchwinski affair and the election of Toliver back to the presidency, when Nugent charged two workers in the St. Paul car gang of being "badly intoxicated" and "willingly and knowingly" damaging and destroying several cases of beer, the local simply voted to drop any disciplinary case against the two men. Despite protests from the foreman, the two were sent to work again the very next morning. After Nugent received the bill for damages from the brewery, he sent a letter demanding the

⁴⁵⁹ The union's demand for base wages for boat gangs was \$1.00 per hour, 75 or 80 cents for dry storage warehousemen, \$1.20 on the salt boats, with similar raises for winchmen, cold storage warehousemen, and other groups. These represented 25-cent raises for boat gangs, and 15- or 20-cent raises for warehousemen. The employers' final offer was 75 cents for the boat gangs, 95 for salt boats, and 60 at Hansen, these being the status quo; and 65 cents for most other dry storage warehousemen. Car gangs saw an increase from 13 to 15 cents per ton on east-bound cargo, and from 17 to 20 cents per ton on west-bound cargo. For initial boat gang demands see *ibid.*, January 16, 1940; for initial warehouse demands see *ibid.*, February 8, 1940. On Hansen strike, *ibid.*, April 11, 1940. Boat gangs accept the status quo wage, *ibid.*, April 8, 1940. National Terminal warehousemen accept the 5-cent raise, *ibid.*, April 15, 1940. Hansen final offer reflected in contract, signed in June, 1940, see *ibid.*, Folder 8, Box 13. On car gangs, compare 1939 and 1940 contracts in *ibid.*, Folder 19, Box 13.

two men pay \$18.61 to cover the damages, to which Toliver responded, "I am sorry to say that I cannot answer your question, I do not know who is going to pay for the damage. It has been our opinion in dealing with the men, that punishment does not help situations any, but we assure you that we have put forth our best efforts to see that a reoccurrence of this incident will not happen".⁴⁶⁰

Local 815 thus showed both a concern to tighten up discipline in the service of keeping work at the Milwaukee port, as well as a reticence about carrying out the employers' concrete demands for such discipline, straddling an uneasy divide between keeping their hold on the conditions of labor on the docks on the one hand and responding to employers' credible threats on the other. Similarly, early in 1941, the local did not exhibit the same organizational expansionism it had in 1936 with the inland warehouses, reflecting a perception that they were under more stringent constraints than they were before. Nugent, in addition to contracting labor for the railroad and lake shipping companies, also contracted for manufacturing concerns. Not only did Local 815 make no attempt to organize this group, but when some of them approached the local to join, they were *turned away*. The longshoremen seemed to be under the impression that, given how negotiations went in 1940, they simply did not have the resources to run an adequate campaign or service more contracts.⁴⁶¹

Perhaps the attitude of longtime car gang steward Hobart Wharton reflected both the problem of a tenuous hold on internal order and a widespread skepticism of the robustness of the longshoremen's organization. In the summer of 1940, the local voted to fine him along with junior steward D. Crawford for having "refused to walk off the job at the time of the deadline", in connection

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., Folder 23, Box 13, George Nugent to Aaron Toliver, September 20, 1940; Aaron Toliver to George Nugent, October 1, 1940; C. R. Dummler to W. J. Nugent Contracting Co, November 7, 1940. Also, Volume 2, Box 1, September 23, 1940. Toliver was a bit cheeky in his response, as Nugent had not asked a question. It is also interesting to note that while the lost cargo provisions were added in 1940 to the boat gang contracts, none were added to the car gang contracts.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., Volume 2, Box 1, January 30, 1941.

to some otherwise unrecorded work stoppage. The two men received a relatively extreme \$15 fine each; in response, Wharton remarked that maybe he would pay the fine, and maybe he wouldn't, because, after all, Local 815 "may be broken up" anyway.⁴⁶²

This, then, was the context in which the local's radicals had to operate going into 1941. They had won the factional battle, but not decisively, and without a clear mandate from the membership apart from Toliver's election to the presidency. His lead, moreover, was counterweighted by the conservative John Brzek as vice president – rather nicely teeing up the big conflict in 1942.⁴⁶³ The balance of forces within the local was such that it was unclear whether a return to the openly combative style of labor-management relations was even feasible; the balance of forces on the waterfront was such that the radical strategy was risky even if they did everything right.

Already on this shaky ground, the longshoremen were hit with two bombshells in the spring of 41. First, Kenneth Goff, after having done his part for the national anticommunist trials, went for another round in Wisconsin's "Little Dies" committee creating another wave of conspicuous and sensational reports about the takeover of labor, liberal, and progressive forces in the state of Wisconsin

⁴⁶² Ibid., Volume 2, Box 1, July 19, 1940.

⁴⁶³ The remainder of the board was Charles Pilarski, recording secretary; J. J. Wagner, financial secretary and treasurer; Bruno Radaj, business agent; Willie Hemmitt, Leo Johnson, and Stanley Brzek, trustees; George Carlson, marshal. Johnson was a stalwart Toliver ally, and Stanley Brzek a longtime member of the conservative group. To the extent the other men had clear factional allegiances, these are unknown, and they may not have. In a comically inconvenient twist, the local had two J. J. Wagner's and two Charles Pilarski's, the former being unrelated "John Josephs" and the latter a father-son pair. Pilarski, Sr. was a delegate with Toliver to the WCSL convention in Madison in 1941, but it is never clarified which of the two was on the executive board. One or other of the J. J. Wagner's was also a WCSL delegate in 1941, testified against Toliver in 1942, and clearly bristled at Brzek immediately after the expulsions were complete. The Wagner who testified was certainly the same who was a delegate, as this is mentioned in his testimony. If it is safe to assume that all the WCSL delegates were also board members, then it can be assumed that Pilarski was at least *not* strongly aligned with the conservative faction, as he made no testimony against the expelled; and that Wagner did lean conservative, as he did testify. By that criterion, Radaj was also aligned with the conservatives. Hemmitt was the only other black board member besides Toliver, which generally reduces the likelihood of a strong alignment with the conservatives (based on Chybowski's description of the group as "primarily white" [24]) but provides no other insight. If we assume he would tend toward Toliver's side, this makes four radical-leaning board members, four conservative-leaning board members, and one, George Carlson, about whom there is no material whatsoever to support speculation.

by the Communist Party. This time however, he named Aaron Toliver explicitly, as described in chapter 5. If Toliver had caught some of the shrapnel off Schnering and Goff's previous accusations about the WCSL and the Workers' Alliance before, this time he took a direct hit, being named as a major player among the most infamous labor radicals in the state like Harold Christoffel and Emil Costello in a plot to keep the United States out of the war in Europe by means of industrial sabotage. In short, opponents of Local 815's radical leadership within the union, the broader ILA, the FTC and WSFL, among the employers and port leadership now had what passed as a watertight charge of Communist and subversive influence among the longshoremen.

Second, just as the navigation season was about to begin in late April, the Great Lakes' most powerful shipping company went on the offensive against labor not only in Milwaukee but throughout the entire region, placing an embargo on all ports and accepting no cargo on its docks anywhere. Historically one of the Milwaukee longshoremen's more obstinate employers, the GLTC decided to show its power and deliver a body blow to waterfront workers over a wage dispute. In fact, the GLTC was responding to *many* wage disputes at once. Longshoremen in nearly all the major ports were bargaining at the same time for wage increases, but they were not coordinating with one another on setting a standard wage or determining other contract standards. For Milwaukee, then, one of the dangers of the lockout was that if the Chicago local settled with the company first, the company could simply divert Milwaukee freight through Chicago instead.⁴⁶⁴

In Milwaukee, the GLTC justified its refusal of the longshoremen's wage demands on the grounds that they had signed a contract with a two-year term one year ago. Starting in April, the local

⁴⁶⁴ "Cargo Refused for Ships Here," *Milwaukee Journal*, April 25, 1941, p. 1. The Milwaukee longshoremen did not seem any closer to good relations with the Chicago ILA than they were in 1937. In May 1940 – the nearest explicit mention of the Chicago longshoremen to the GLTC lockout – Local 19 in Chicago appealed to Local 815 for support in a strike, but the Milwaukee longshoremen flatly refused (ILA 815 Records, Volume 5, Box 1, May 10, 1940).

embarked on wage renegotiations with all the waterfront employers, taking advantage of an improvement in business at the port. This in itself signaled that the local was starting to regain its confidence, as it seemed to exploit an ambiguity of a contract clause that stipulated that “should either party desire to alter or amend this agreement, notice to the other party...shall be given in writing at least thirty (30) days prior to the expiration of this agreement, and should the parties fail to give notice, this agreement shall remain in full force for an additional one year”. GLTC interpreted this clause to mean that the present contract was in effect through April 15, 1942, and that if neither party gave notice by thirty days before that date, the contract would simply renew for another year; the longshoremen interpreted it to mean that both parties to the contract had the right to renegotiate during the term if they gave notice prior to thirty days before expiration. In fact, all the boat gang employers *except* the GLTC returned to the table to negotiate a supplementary agreement on wages, and the local even moderated their opening demand from the previous year down to only a 15 cent raise to 90 cents for boat gangs – then the rate for Chicago’s longshoremen – rather than the 25 cents the longshoremen proposed in 1940. The local was also demanding a 75 cent base wage for warehousemen, representing a 10 cent raise for most, and 15 cents for Hansen workers.⁴⁶⁵

By April 21, Local 815 managed to negotiate a 5 cent raise for boat gangs with every employer except the GLTC. The members voted to accept this increase and the employers – National Terminal, Hansen Storage, the Canada Atlantic Transit Company, and the Canadian Pacific Great Lakes Line – signed agreements on the 24th. The next day, the GLTC began its lockout, citing a “threatened stoppage” of dock labor. This complicated the matter of signing contracts at Hansen and National Terminal, where

⁴⁶⁵ E.g., ILA 815 Records, Folder 7, Box 13, GLTC Agreement, 1940. Ibid., Volume 2, Box 1, February 3, 1941. It is noted that 90 cents was the Chicago rate in Volume 2, Box 1, April 14, 1941.

GLTC leased dock and warehouse facilities.⁴⁶⁶ Being such a large employer and general source of business on the port, the city government itself entered the fray, apparently for the first time, when Democratic mayor Carl Zeidler tasked the common council's industrial peace committee to mediate the dispute.⁴⁶⁷

Throughout these negotiations, the union maintained that it was not on strike against the GLTC and stood ready to work the ships. But the company argued it did not wish to continue operations while ongoing disputes existed between the union and the warehouses where GLTC leased space. This was a gift to National Terminal and Hansen, who were also parties to the industrial peace commission meetings. The union's warehousemen were, of course, in dispute with these companies, and even on strike at Hansen. A truce was proposed: if the longshoremen withdraw their insistence to renegotiate the contracts and go into arbitration with the two warehouses, the GLTC would end the lockout and pay them whatever wage increase was set by the outcome of the company's arbitration with the Buffalo ILA local. Two of the radicals, David Altman and Delmer Biddle, argued that the membership should vote down this agreement, but their resolution lost in a landslide 21-150. The membership accepted the agreement; the lockout was over on May 8, the union and the warehouses went to arbitration, and the GLTC boat gangs waited to see what would happen in Buffalo. All turned out much better than Altman

⁴⁶⁶ This highlights the complexity of employment relations on the waterfront, which I have otherwise not very strongly emphasized throughout this work. Hansen and National Terminal played the role of contractor of boat gangs with various smaller shippers, but the GLTC had its own contractors (in Milwaukee, the contractor was W. A. Sellon). Contracts did not follow employers but work gangs. Thus, while Hansen and National Terminal signed the wage agreements for boat gangs, GLTC's refusal to do so for its own boat gangs affected negotiations between those companies and their warehousemen. *These* negotiations concerned *both* a supplementary wage agreement at Hansen and a whole new contract at National Terminal, where the 1940 contract had only a one-year term, as opposed to the two-year contracts at GLTC and elsewhere.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, Volume 2, Box 1, April 21, 1941. "Cargo Refused," *Milwaukee Journal*; "Dispute Ties Up Lake Freighters," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 26, 1941, p. 15; "Seeks to End Ship Embargo," *Milwaukee Journal*, April 26, 1941, p. 10; "Work on Two Fronts To Bring an End to Transit Co. Embargo," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 27, 1941, p. 11.

and Biddle must have expected: the Buffalo longshoremen were awarded a 7.5 cent raise, and arbitrators sided with Local 815 in the warehouse case, granting the 5 cent raise.⁴⁶⁸

No doubt these results heartened the longshoremen. In June, a seven-hour strike at Nugent forced him to finally sign a car gang contract. Perhaps even more tellingly, after the local brought all regular foremen and checkers into its organization – the foremen having no voting rights – the local unanimously voted that GLTC checker Hank Shilsky should walk off the job if the company failed to give him a \$25 per month raise, and that the union would refuse to replace him. The local also extended its policy of requiring the employers to supply various kinds of equipment – cold storage workers were already to be supplied with coats and gloves, for instance – down to every conceivable item the longshoremen may need for their jobs (“even coopers’ needles”). No details are given, but in July international president Joe Ryan wrote to the local to express his concern and demand to know why the men were not living up to their side of the contract with National Terminal. Meanwhile, the local was expanding its reach again, especially in the waterfront cement plants, where they were threatening and carrying out strikes for recognition and new contracts. Strike threats also got contracts signed at National Terminal in August.⁴⁶⁹

Finally, in September, the local decided it would bring the fight back to the GLTC. Starting in December of 1940, Local 815 began to experiment with new ways of taking the offensive, perhaps in light of the tightening constraints in the waterfront job market. They decided that, when the time was right, they would make a “test case of the wage and hour law,” the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938,

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., Volume 2, Box 1, May 7, 1941; Folder 4, Box 10: telegram from Edmond Sullivan (Pres. Local 1462) to Charles Pilarski, May 2, 1941; telegram from S. P. O’Brien, May 10, 1941; letters from Max Raskin to Hansen Storage Company and National Terminal Corporation, June 6, 1941. All *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 1941: “Parley Is Held On Wages For Dock Workers,” April 30, p. 24; “AFL Longshoremen Agree to Arbitrate,” May 8, p. 17; “Longshoremen of AFL To Go Back to Work,” May 22, p. 26.

⁴⁶⁹ ILA Records, Volume 2, Box 1, June 13, June 19, July 15, August 15, August 16, 1941.

and consulted with attorneys about the interpretation of the law. The test specifically concerned the law's rules on overtime which stated that no employer could make anyone work more than forty hours unless the employee is paid time-and-a-half for the extra time, except where there is a collective bargaining agreement limiting employment to 1000 hours during any twenty-six consecutive weeks.⁴⁷⁰

On September 7, the GLTC laid off John Banasek at the end of his 1000 hours, and the rest of the men walked out in protest. At a special meeting held that evening, the membership voted 109-59 to strike the company. The leadership as a whole evidently backed the action, factional divisions notwithstanding. In fact, the contract *did* explicitly include the 1000 hours clause of the FLSA. Accordingly, Local 815's case was not that the parties were not bound to this rule, but that they were bound to conflicting rules: that no employee may work more than 1000 hours in any consecutive twenty-six weeks without the company being held liable for overtime pay, on the one hand; and that the company could not lay off workers, because all hiring and firing must be done through the union hall, on the other. They added to this that men could not be fired without "good cause", implying that the company's desire not to pay overtime did not count as good cause. The company argued that the union was attempting to force the company to violate the FLSA; no doubt the union would maintain that there would be no violation of the law if the company paid the overtime.⁴⁷¹

Of the eighty men striking GLTC, another fifty would have reached their 1000 hours within another two weeks, and the expiration of the twenty-six weeks was still more than four weeks away. Ninety more workers employed by Nugent would exceed 1000 hours by the deadline, and another fifty working for DuPuy. Back pay in overtime wages for the eighty GLTC employees alone would amount to

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., Volume 2, Box 1, December 9, December 21, 1940.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., Folder 4, Box 10, telegram from Charles Pilarski to M. Anttila, undated, 1941. "Walkout Ties Up 2 Lake Freighters," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 7, 1941, p. 6; "AFL Demand, Law in Clash," *Milwaukee Journal*, September 10, 1941, p. 19.

over \$20,000. Certainly, this was one way to make up for GLTC's obstinacy in raising the longshoremen's wages. The strike was successful, not in winning the back pay, but in forcing the company to reinstate Banasek three days later. The National Maritime Union had helped ensure the strike would wrap up quickly by refusing to cross the picket line, tying up the *Alfred H. Smith* and the *Utica* in the Milwaukee harbor.⁴⁷²

The union's action had forced the GLTC back to the table – there would be more men reaching their 1000 hours, after all, and the union could hang the threat of a legal case over thousands of dollars in back pay over the company's head. At a meeting with the company's team, the GLTC proposed a solution: they would redefine the twenty-six week period as being from March 9 to September 6, rather than April 15 to October 16, thereby excluding the first five or six weeks of the shipping season and bringing Banasek back under 1000 hours and the other men further away from that limit as well; second, effective immediately the men would be put on a forty-hour week, with time and half of the base wage for overtime, or \$1.24 per hour.

The union's team knew that the deal would take the question of back pay off the table, and they were skeptical about only basing overtime pay on the base rate alone rather than maintaining a special premium for night work, believing that the added hazard of the work called for better pay. The union's attorney also counseled against taking the deal on the same grounds. The union made a counteroffer: Local 815 would initiate no work stoppage on the issue of the back pay or the wage and hour law until a decision was handed down by the court, which both parties would accept. As for the workers, each man would continue to be paid on the present scale until he reached 1000 hours, at which point he would continue on a forty-hour basis. For the first forty hours his wage would be calculated as it currently was,

⁴⁷² "Walkout," *Milwaukee Sentinel*; "AFL Demand," *Milwaukee Journal*; ILA 815 Records, Folder 6, Box 9, telegram from Charles Abar to Aaron Toliver, September 7, 1941.

and then after forty he would be paid time and half or \$1.24 during the day, or \$1.46 for nights and holidays. The company accepted, and from that point on, the GLTC simply kept men on past their 1000 hours in violation of the FLSA and the contract to avoid what the union considered a more fundamental violation – and any more strikes. This settlement became the basis for car gang agreements later in the fall, as well, and in October, the union’s attorney filed a lawsuit to obtain the \$20,000 in back pay.⁴⁷³

It is worth emphasizing the decidedly non-factional character of this particular move against the GLTC – in other words, again undermining the simple explanation that blame’s the union’s troubles on the irresponsibility of a radical minority. Rather than a subversive plot, it was a plan discussed openly with the membership as early as December 1940, wherein they consulted with multiple lawyers who advised them to proceed. The committee that organized and advocated for the walkout in support of Banasek was probably composed of radicals – certainly Delmer Biddle and Leo Johnson were, and Lamon Williams had been an initiator and major part of the anti-Marchwinski movement, while nothing is known of Oscar Allen’s allegiance.⁴⁷⁴ But at the same September 7 meeting where these men appealed to the members to vote to strike, John Brzek, Bruno Radaj, and conservative-leaning president-elect August “Gust” Bohn all spoke in favor of the strike as well. The committee that negotiated the new payment system with the GLTC after Banasek’s reinstatement likewise does not bear the stamp of any one faction, instead including the original walkout committee plus a broad cross-section of the leadership: Gust Bohn, J. J. Wagner, Dale Richards, Bruno Radaj, Aaron Toliver, and Laurence Linstad. Among these, only Toliver was a radical figure. Nothing suggests there was serious disagreement within this negotiating committee over rejecting the GLTC’s initial offer or in proposing

⁴⁷³ ILA 815 Records, Folder 9, Box 6, letters from W. A. Sellon to Bruno Radaj, September 30, October 6, 1941; *ibid.*, Volume 4, Box 1, October 6, October 11, October 21, 1941. “Longshoremen Sue for Overtime Pay,” *Milwaukee Journal*, October 8, 1941, p. 10.

⁴⁷⁴ Williams, Allen, and Biddle were all GLTC boat gang stewards; Johnson was the new vice president, and therefore a senior steward.

their own; indeed, the counterproposal was offered the very same day, with the intervention of only a short recess in which most of the men had another unrelated matter to attend to, suggesting they reached a consensus among themselves in almost no time. Toliver was still the president when the walkout began, but the negotiations, the move to apply the GLTC agreement to other contracts, and the lawsuit to claim the back pay all were carried out under the non-radical Bohn presidency.⁴⁷⁵

It seemed rather that the successes of the audacious campaign to win supplementary agreements, the experience of GLTC's disproportionate response in their lockout, and the quick victory in the 1000-hour controversy had begun to smooth over any deep factional rifts. There was at this stage apparently no hesitation about relations with the NMU; Local 815 even threw a party for the crews of the *Smith* and the *Utica* in appreciation for their solidarity during the GLTC strike, coordinating fundraising efforts for this purpose in every work gang. In December, the longshoremen would again reciprocate, pulling the plank from the *Milwaukee Clipper* when NMU sailors struck the ship, having unloaded only passengers' cars and war materials.⁴⁷⁶

Likewise, the local as a whole was again alienated from the local AFL council, which they had only just voted to rejoin in August. In October, the FTC refused to seat Toliver as a delegate despite his being duly elected by the membership of Local 815, citing his "communistic activities". In response, the membership voted to withdraw from the council and demand a refund, pending an appeal. The Bohn leadership supported seating Toliver, rather than take the council up on their offer simply to choose

⁴⁷⁵ ILA 815 Records, Volume 2, Box 1, September 7, September 17, 1941.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., Folder 6, Box 9, letter from Richards, Toliver, and Bohn to the crew of the *Alfred E. Smith*, September 26, 1941; Committee's report on party for GLTC sailors, September 26, 1941; *ibid.*, Volume 4, Box 1, December 19, 1941.

another delegate; by February 1942, after a long back-and-forth on the question, the local withdrew again.⁴⁷⁷

If the local's conservatives were warming up to the idea of collaboration and friendship with the CIO, it is also likely that the local's radicals – rather, specifically Communists and fellow travelers – were in the process of moderating or deprioritizing their commitment to an adversarial vision of unionism and class struggle. The Communist Party broke with the peace movement in June 1941 after the Nazi's Operation Barbarossa brought the Soviet Union into the war on the side of the Allied Powers, and officially made military victory over the Axis its *raison d'être* – until the war against international fascism was won, the war against domestic capitalism was off. For the Communist Party in the labor movement, this meant an ironclad obligation to maintain efficient and uninterrupted wartime production and unconditional support for the AFL and CIO's no-strike pledge for the duration – even if it meant strikebreaking. Indeed, two of the most well-known and powerful Communist labor leaders, Harry Bridges (ILWU) and Joe Curran (NMU), belonged to the maritime industry and were particularly militant supporters of the pledge, Bridges in particular calling for speedups and a *permanent* no-strike pledge.⁴⁷⁸

It would be a mistake to conclude thence that rank-and-file Communists and certainly fellow travelers everywhere and immediately adopted these principles. Certainly the radicals in Local 815 – along with most of the rest of the local – were in favor of the strike action in September 1941 to reinstate John Banasek, and supported as well the NMU's strike in December. At any rate, it was not until December 15, 1941, a week after the Pearl Harbor attack and just before the NMU *Clipper* strike, that the no-strike pledge was formally announced. Nevertheless, the changing priorities of Communist

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., Folder 6, Box 9, letters between Bohn/Richards and F. H. Ranney, October 16, December 16, 1941; January 28, February 13, 1942. Ibid., Volume 4, Box 1, October 16, October 20, December 8, 1941.

⁴⁷⁸ Nelson Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home: The CIO in World War II* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 196, 213.

activists might well have begun to diminish the basic ideological differences between the radical and conservative factions in the local about the role and purpose of labor unionism, and create a basis for alliance or at least non-aggression between local radicals and the international bureaucracy.⁴⁷⁹

But the tides would turn again when on October 23 – hardly a month after the longshoremen’s new and highly favorable settlement on the 1000-hours issue – the GLTC announced they would leave the port of Milwaukee for the remainder of the shipping season “due to unsettled labor conditions”. Since the brief strike to reinstate Banasek, there had been no stoppage of work by longshoremen at the company, but perhaps it is no coincidence that their announcement came just two weeks after the longshoremen filed their federal lawsuit against the company for thousands of dollars of retroactive overtime pay. Soon after, Sellon called and set up a meeting with Bohn, Johnson, Toliver, Wagner, Radaj, and Richards. He told him that if he had the written word of the local stating that “there would be no further tie up on the car gang or the boat gang side he was ready to go to Buffalo on his own to try and do something in regard to getting the boats back”. The local obliged, immediately producing a letter to that effect, and Sellon said he would have an update for them within forty-eight hours. He did: “Regret my efforts to reestablish service unsuccessful”.⁴⁸⁰

And so, the navigation season closed with a bad omen. If the struggle with the GLTC had begun to close the factional divides in 1941, it now threatened to tear them open again. For now, the longshoremen could not see what was coming, and finished out the year in a naïve calm – going back

⁴⁷⁹ Such Communist allegiances to union bureaucracies were perhaps most dramatically on display in the United Auto Workers and the United Rubber Workers, for instance. The URW had perhaps the largest rank-and-file opposition to the no-strike pledge of any union, and the Communists role was entirely to support the leadership against such opposition. The UAW also saw the rise of the anti-no-strike Rank and File Caucus, virulently opposed by the Communists, and the alignment of the CP with the Addes-Frankensteen caucus to Reuther’s right. See, e.g.: Lichtenstein, 199-200; 140-46; 194-97.

⁴⁸⁰ ILA Records, Volume 4, Box 1, October 23, October 30, 1941; *ibid.*, Folder 6, Box 9, telegram from Sellon to Bohn, November 1, 1941. “Firm Halts Sailing of Its Ships Here,” *Milwaukee Journal*, October 23, 1941, p. 4.

and forth with the FTC, dealing with a minor jurisdictional dispute over a handful of cement workers, arranging with the Teamsters Local 200 to share Hansen Storage, the short sympathy strike on the *Clipper*, and little else. The shipping season ended at the end of November, the GLTC having denied the longshoremen some 50,000 tons of freight in the meantime.⁴⁸¹

2. Expulsions and aftermath – the end of the radical project in Local 815, 1942

The next year began much as the previous year had ended. No doubt GLTC's sudden departure the previous October was making the longshoremen anxious, but there are no special indications in the minutes that the men were on edge; there was no finger-pointing or recriminations. As it usually would, the local began taking up the issue of contracts; in early February, the local sent the standard form letters notifying W. A. Sellon and the GLTC that they were ready to open negotiations on the year's contract on or before the 20th.⁴⁸²

Yet the local, the international, and the city were all aware of the danger that the company would simply not return. In a February 6 letter to Local 815, ILA Great Lakes District president Simon O'Brien wrote that "on account of Lakes lines putting embargoes on at different ports" he was attempting to organize a meeting in Chicago to convene Great Lakes ILA locals to hammer out some plan to respond in concert. The local replied on the 9th that they were "ready at any time and date you desire" and urgently interested in such a meeting. The same day, Bruno Radaj and Robert Cullen, a black rank-and-file member and GLTC worker, met with Mayor Zeidler, who had been in communication with the company's leadership. Reporting back to the membership, they said that the mayor asked for a

⁴⁸¹ ILA Records, Volume 4, Box 1, November 7, December 19, 1941. "Firm Halts Sailing," *Milwaukee Journal*.

⁴⁸² ILA Records, Folder 9, Box 6, letters from Bohn and Richards to Great Lakes Transit Co. and W. A. Sellon, February 2, February 5, 1942.

commitment to a no-strike clause in the contract with GLTC, that labor must be more efficient and reliable, and that these were direct requests from the company. It was immediately moved and carried that a no-strike clause be added to the contracts for the duration – along with a no-lockout clause. Gust Bohn, Dale Richards, and Aaron Toliver were chosen by the membership to serve as the local's delegates to future meetings with the mayor and entreated to "carry out their mission and make every effort for a return of our work".⁴⁸³

In fact, the attendees of the meeting were Bohn, Richards, Toliver, and Radaj; the local's attorney Arthur Richter; Harry Brockel, secretary of the Harbor Commission; and Alderman John Bohn, president of the Common Council, in addition to the mayor. The mayor wasted no time in putting responsibility for the matter squarely at the feet of Local 815. He told them that the local had a bad reputation as a troublesome union and that they had to give assurances that more cooperative relations with the employers would be built in Milwaukee, and "this bad situation cleaned up here once and for all". In Zeidler's letter to H. T. Hoopes, president of the GLTC, he relayed that Local 815's representatives assured the city authorities that "no bad working conditions would be tolerated, that the union would assume responsibility and see to it that loyal, efficient service was rendered by the employes, and they were willing to have a speedup for victory", and requested that Hoopes come to Milwaukee to meet with representatives of Local 815; Herman Seide of the WSFL and also a member of the Harbor Commission; Richard Walton, ILA International vice president; the stevedore contractors; representatives of the railroad companies; representatives of the Harbor Commission; members of the Common Council, and the mayor.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸³ Ibid., Folder 4, Box 10, letter from Simon O'Brien to Charles Pilarski, February 6, 1942; letter from Bohn and Richards to Simon O'Brien, February 9, 1942. Ibid., Volume 4, Box 1, February 9, 1942.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., Volume 4, Box 1, "Special meeting with Carl Zeidler," 1942. Ibid., Folder 9, Box 6, letter from Zeidler to Hoopes, February 11, 1942.

Hoopes wrote back expressing his regrets regarding the necessity of leaving Milwaukee, and that there would be no way for him to travel to the city for such a meeting. He insisted that the financial situation of the company made any reconsideration of their decision to leave Milwaukee quite impossible. However – and perhaps in a deliberate test of Milwaukee’s desperation – he told them that he would be glad to receive the negotiating party in Buffalo. Indeed, they were desperate; ten days later, on February 27, they went to Buffalo. Included in Milwaukee’s delegation were Simon O’Brien; E. J. Sullivan, president and business agent of the Buffalo ILA Local 1462; Bohn, Richards, and Radaj from Local 815; and Harry Brockel for the Harbor Commission. Toliver was notably absent this time; absent also was Local 815’s vice president Leo Johnson. At the local’s last membership meeting before the trip to Buffalo, a few suggestive decisions were made: first, a proposed contract was approved that contained not only the no-strike clause, but, for the first time, a formal grievance procedure; second, the delegation would ask for a 10 cent increase in the contract; third, the local preemptively voted to accept whatever contract the delegation came back with, giving them full authority to make a final decision without a vote by the rank-and-file; finally, they voted overwhelmingly *against* a motion – only six voting in favor – to include vice president Johnson in the delegation.⁴⁸⁵

2.1. Milwaukee longshoremen get buffaloed

At the meeting in Buffalo, Hoopes emphasized that the reason for the removal of GLTC from the Milwaukee port did not come down entirely to labor conditions. Rather, the most basic reason was simply that tonnage, and so revenues, had long been in decline. Given the shrinking volume of freight,

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., letter from Hoopes to Zeidler, February 17, 1942; Brockel, “Conference with Great Lakes Transit Corporation, Buffalo, New York, February 27, 1942”. Ibid., Volume 4, Box 1, February 23, 1942. One wonders if these six were not simply the remainder of the men who would, along with Johnson, soon be expelled.

the cost of servicing so many ports had long been excessive but was reaching a point the company could no longer endure, and that therefore it was necessary to consolidate operations – and that this consolidation was best accomplished at Chicago.

Yet he took his opportunity to embarrass the local. The choice to consolidate at Chicago rather than Milwaukee, he suggested, had to do in part with the “facilities and general activity” of the port, but the failure of the union in “disciplining the men” or to do anything about the “general all-around laxness in the work” ultimately informed the decision to discontinue service at Milwaukee and go instead “where the chances of...breaking even are more secure”. He told them that “a failure of the local to maintain and carry on in an orderly and cooperative working plan” with company officials and the “lack of harmony” between the two parties made Milwaukee unattractive. After the local’s representatives pleaded that labor conditions would be improved, Hoopes simply carried on, saying that upon any return to Milwaukee, the company “would take no more abuse from the stewards and officials of the local”, to which the representatives replied that they would ensure that only “competent stewards” would be appointed going forward. After all this, however, he reiterated that “the problem of economy was the greatest one”, and that Chicago’s port facilities made it possible to make more trips and have a continuous operation – in other words, to unload at a single dock, rather than having to move from house to house, as in Milwaukee. Unless Milwaukee could submit a definite plan to the company to guarantee this kind of operation, he simply could give no further consideration to returning.⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., Brockel, “Conference with Great Lakes Transit Corporation, Buffalo, New York, February 27, 1942”. Volume 5, Box 1, “Arrived in Buffalo at 8AM Thursday morning”. Without knowing more about Chicago’s Local 19, it is impossible to say whether it is true that the GLTC agents had *better* relationships with the longshoremen there. Local 815’s minutes reflect at least one strike by Local 19, which 815 refused to support; and the company cited an ongoing conflict with Chicago during its lockout in 1941 (“Some Harbors Lift Embargo,” *Milwaukee Journal*, May 3, 1941, p. 14). It seems plausible that Local 19 was always more cooperative, but Hoopes should be seen as taking advantage of the opportunity to see what *he* could get out of this meeting, which would mean encouraging Local 815 to compete with Local 19 on the basis of wages and quality of service.

The union's representatives continued their case, emphasizing the competitive advantages of Milwaukee compared to Chicago, it being 170 miles closer; offering to attempt to secure access to Warehouse #10, one of the larger railroad warehouses on the riverfront, so that GLTC could move out of the smaller and less efficient operations at National Terminal and Hansen Storage; promising the company two shifts without overtime to help keep labor costs down; and a guarantee from the union that there would be no work stoppages while grievances are arbitrated. Hoopes told the men to submit a concrete plan in writing to his board of directors, and he would take it to them for a reconsideration of the question. At this, the meeting adjourned. Local 815, abjectly dependent on the employment provided by a company operating at a loss, traded a concessionary contract – and, implicitly, a shakeup of the local – in exchange for the GLTC's commitment to undertake another cost study.⁴⁸⁷

When the delegation returned to Milwaukee the changes in the local were swift. At the executive board meeting on March 1, the agreement with GLTC was adopted, this followed immediately by the calling of a reelection of all stewards "because some are negligent and incompetent". W. A. Sellon asked for a meeting with the delegation on March 2. As an independent contractor, GLTC also represented a major part of his own business, so he wanted to discuss with the men a contract that would maximize the likelihood of the company deciding to return – and, after all, he ultimately had to sign the contract, not the company. Crucially, Sellon was also the GLTC's contractor in Chicago. His strategy, then, was to use Chicago's competitive position as stick to force even deeper concessions out of the Milwaukee longshoremen, promising the carrot of all the boats the longshoremen would need to sustain a two-shift operation. He was uniquely situated, he suggested, to persuade the company to call at Milwaukee, but he just needed the right contract.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., Brockel.

He told the men he was working both sides: he had a signed contract with the railroad company in Chicago that they would build out more space at the terminal to handle his freight. For Milwaukee to compete, he must have Houses 8 and 9 kept clean, and must have House 10. Furthermore, whichever place, Milwaukee or Chicago, costed more money, would be out of the picture. With that in mind, he laid down these points: First, board members Johnson and Wagner had been brought in on the negotiations, and he wanted them out – he wanted the same committee of three that Hoopes had seen. No doubt his experience with Johnson as dock representative prompted this demand. Second, he wanted to know he could count on last year's wage scale; he agreed to ask the GLTC for a voluntary five cent raise, given the company's willingness to grant Local 1462's arbitration award to 815 the previous year, but he would not insist. Third, he wanted the foremen under his control and not required to belong to the union. To this the union's committee agreed to remain neutral on foremen. Fourth, the local must accept a one-shift operation "if necessary for the economical picture". Finally, in contrast to "what he had here the last four years he must have some control over his men". This means that the foreman must be in charge at all times, and that Sellon must have the right to hire fill-in men off the dock – in other words, he wanted the union to agree to a shape-up.⁴⁸⁸

On March 8, the board determined that the men would return to work on last year's wage scale if necessary. At the same meeting, it was mentioned that a report was published in the *Sentinel* to the effect that the union had telegraphed federal mediator John Steelman to resolve a "deadlock in negotiations" between Sellon and the longshoremen, with "union spokesmen" saying that the company intended to hire by the shape-up and only pay overtime after fifty-six hours worked. None of the officers knew who spoke to the reporter, and none had authorized reaching out to the mediator – but it was

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., Volume 4, Box 1, "Special meeting with W. A. Sellon," March 2, 1942.

believed that those who did so were deliberately attempting to undermine the union. If Sellon or the GLTC saw the report, they might balk.

Of course, it was true that the company was attempting to return to the shape-up, and that the local would refuse this demand. Vice president Johnson, at the same meeting, suggested that a meeting be set up with Major Holmes, a liaison to the War Labor Board who was in town, to go through Sellon's proposals. Managing to secure a meeting with Holmes later that day, the matter of the shape-up was the first point raised; they categorically opposed it on the grounds that "this would tear down what it had taken us years to build up". Holmes agreed on this point, and also that the five-cent raise they were asking for was not unreasonable, but that they should accept Sellon's proposal that foremen are not to be members of the union. Moreover, the executive board did seek some mediation machinery on essentially the same grounds as had been reported in the *Sentinel*, seeing no way to accept Sellon's demands. Holmes agreed then to meet with Sellon, along with Zeidler and Brockel; he also agreed, at the local's request, to write a letter to Hoopes informing him that "W. A. Sellon was attempting to cause great disruption here". Nevertheless, they resolved that any man connected with the report "or in any way attempting to undermine our local" was to be expelled, and that Steelman should be contacted to see if he would tell them who sent the telegram.⁴⁸⁹

The matter of the Steelman telegram seemed to be the trigger to initiate a general sweep for troublemakers in the local. At the same membership meeting on the 9th, it was announced, quite apropos of nothing, that members Orville Potter and David Altman had been passing out CIO literature at the Greenbaum Tannery in Milwaukee – presumably helping with some project of either the Fur and

⁴⁸⁹ Longshoremen Seek Federal Mediator To Solve Dispute," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 8, 1942, p. 2. ILA 815 Records, Volume 4, Box 1, March 8, March 9, and "Meeting, Major Holmes, Schroeder Hotel, 2 o'clock. Sunday. PM," 1942.

Leather Workers or the United Shoe Workers. Why this should be considered untoward behavior of ILA members who months earlier had struck in sympathy with the NMU was left unsaid, or at least unrecorded. At any rate, the grievance committee – comprised of the board-at-large, plus Toliver its chairman – was appointed to get to the bottom of the matter of the Steelman telegram.⁴⁹⁰

2.2. The expulsions and the role of anticommunism

The purpose of the March 25 executive board meeting was to hear the grievance committee's report "on the charge of members undermining the local" – ostensibly, again, the Steelman telegram, as that was the issue they had been appointed to investigate. Presently, this was the composition of the body, a total of eleven men, favoring the conservatives: Gust Bohn, president; Leo Johnson, vice president; J. J. Wagner, financial secretary; Dale Richards, recording secretary; Bruno Radaj, business agent; John Brzek, Tim McCormick, Dan Cabunac, board-at-large; Stanley Brzek, Willie Hemmitt, trustees; Aaron Toliver, grievance committee chairman. Absent were Herman Porter, board-at-large, and Laurence Linstad, trustee. International vice president Richard Walton was also in attendance "to see that the action taken was in line with the Constitution".

The first motion considered by the board, however, was the expulsion of Potter and Altman on the grounds of "being disloyal to the ILA and trying to disrupt our Local 815". "It was pointed out", the minutes read, "that their organization work for the CIO alone was grounds for this". The motion passed 9-2, Toliver and Johnson presumably being the two dissenting votes. The second motion was for the following five men to be expelled and held in suspension until the rank-and-file ratified the expulsion: Aaron Toliver, Leo Johnson, Scott Watson, Delmer Biddle, and Sylvester Wdowicki. No grounds for these

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., March 9, 1942.

expulsions were recorded. The vote was 9-2, Toliver and Johnson *certainly* being the two dissenting votes. That was the end of the meeting, the matter of the telegram apparently forgotten; Toliver and Johnson resigned their offices the following day, and Walton congratulated Bohn, Richards, and Radaj on their “good work in cleaning up our local”.⁴⁹¹

On March 29, the remaining executive board met to prepare for the special membership meeting to be held on the 30th. This entailed changing the locks on all the doors in the union hall, moving the light switch (the meeting room’s lights could be controlled by a switch in the next room), appointing additional guards, arranging police protection (this measure proposed by Walton), and taking all “proper steps...as requested by the Federated Trades [Council]”. At this meeting, the board also unilaterally put an end to the local’s multiple-steward system, based on Walton’s advice. This, apart from suggesting that the local formalize and put in writing a set of by-laws, was apparently the international’s only suggestion regarding the organization of the local – that they had too many stewards on their jobs, and that one steward per boat would be enough.⁴⁹² They decided that the cement plant workers needed no steward whatsoever, as they could simply call the hall for the business agent when they need him; the principle that the steward should be an on-the-job representative and advocate for workers is, of course, absent.⁴⁹³

Finally, at the membership meeting on March 30, the rank-and-file would ratify the board’s expulsions, which of course by now was a formality. First, a vote was taken on whether the men under suspension should be allowed to stay at the meeting; the vote was 40-49 against. The membership then

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., March 25, and “Meeting with R. A. Walton. Wis. Hotel. Thursday Evening March 26 6:30PM,” 1942. Brzek would later accuse Leo Johnson of telegraphing Steelman.

⁴⁹² It is worth remembering in this connection that a typical vessel required three separate gangs, making a total of eighty-four men.

⁴⁹³ Ibid., “Meeting with R. A. Walton”; March 29, 1942.

voted unanimously to expel Potter and Altman, and 118-2 to expel the other five. John Brzek was elected to finish Johnson's term as local vice president.

It was not until a month later that the executive board organized a "trial" to formally charge all the expelled men and hear testimony from witnesses confirming the veracity of the charges. Those testifying included all executive board members, and some longtime leaders: J. J. Wagner, Dan Cabunac, Laurence Linstad, Bruno Radaj, John Brzek, and Stanley Brzek. The formal charges decided upon were "disloyalty, trying to disrupt the union and undermine it, refusal to recognize the authority of officers and representatives of the union, interfering with orderly functioning of the union, and interfering with the performance of work by union members".⁴⁹⁴ Much of the testimony is focused on these men's connections to the broader left scene, and while neither their formal charges nor the elaborated statements directly charge them with Communist Party membership, it is difficult to interpret them as doing other than implying it. The following statements come from a document handwritten by John Brzek on April 17, and the spoken testimonies given at the April 30 meeting.⁴⁹⁵

Against Aaron Toliver: Brzek charged that he had gone to the WCSL prior to the delegates who went in 1941 and "did not tell the union of the procedure they followed", that he attended meetings at the J&J Tavern prior to the regular meetings so that he could "have matters all figured out so...he could slip the matters over on the members"; that he tried to take in a group of men that did not come under the jurisdiction of the local; that he let members violate signed contracts; and finally that he "took sides with the other men mentioned in these charges". To these, Linstad added that Toliver "participated in a May Day parade in 1936", and that "by quoting his name and position in Local 815 in connection with

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., April 30, 1942.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., Folder 6, Box 9, untitled document signed by John Brzek, April 17, 1942. Ibid., Volume 4, Box 1, April 30, 1942.

the Wisconsin Workers' Alliance on one of their strikes" he acquitted himself in a way tending to give us "the name of a nuisance local." Wagner concurred with Brzek that Toliver had failed to inform the membership and the other delegates "what kind of conference they were going to attend" in 1941, and also complained that on the ride to Madison "he spoke continuously on, and in favor of, the CIO". Perhaps the most serious charges against Toliver are that he *wanted to* give fifty withdrawal cards to older members so that he could corral a group of supporters into the local, and that he spent 45 minutes betting on the World Series during a shift.

Against Leo Johnson: Brzek charged that he "did not live up to the contract" while serving as dock representative at GLTC – an especially grave offense, given the company's departure – and had been responsible for the Steelman telegram and the *Sentinel* report. His support for Toliver was named as a charge on its own. Wagner said he "failed to respect the position of the employer or uphold the dignity of Local 815 by always answering or addressing them with offensive language disrespectful to their position" and Radaj said that he enforced slowdowns, tolerated gambling, and engaged in "secret meetings".

Against David Altman, Delmer Biddle, and Orville Potter: Brzek charged that these three held meetings at the same J&J Tavern mentioned in Toliver's charges, that "they contacted different attorneys to find out technical points in selfish interests", and that Altman "is a member of the Youth Congress which is a part of Social Legislation", that is the WCSL. Wagner's later testimony against these three was a copy of Brzek's claim about attorneys, "then agitating the men to the fact that they had been underpaid or had some form of back pay coming, this often leading to such a serious nature as to call a slowed-up operation through whisper campaigns or even a stoppage of work...unsanctioned by the entire membership". Radaj charged that they communicated with various CIO locals to request their

help in swinging Local 815 to the CIO. Linstad pointed out that Altman was a veteran of the Lincoln Brigade, meaning this to be an accusation in itself.

Scott Watson was the only man for whom the charges of Communist affiliation were actually made forthrightly. John Brzek charged – in the clearest innuendo so far – that he “believed in a form of government other than that of the U.S. and agitated on the job the benefits of this government”, and that he was a member of the Youth Congress. Stanley Brzek got to the point and said that Watson had been sent to New York “to study Communism for a six-month period which he has readily admitted”. Watson, Biddle, Potter, and Altman all were accused of dragging meetings out in order to win resolutions by a process of attrition, Watson being “one of the principal speakers for the group” acting in this way. John Brzek said that “he had the loudest mouth on the job” of any man working under him while he was a steward, was guilty of “often vicious and obscene remarks against his fellow workers and his foreman when the word Communism was mentioned”. Brzek also said Watson’s “mind was poisoned against race discrimination”, meaning presumably that Brzek thought Watson too vigilant on the question.

Sylvester Wdowicki was a fairly new member, being sworn in only in October 1941; his transgression was having been taken in by Biddle when the latter was working as an organizer for the local and vouched for by Toliver “under false pretenses”.

I spell out these testimonies in some detail to highlight their nature, and so that they might be considered against the local’s own immediate prior history: in that light, they are either arbitrary or transparently political. Charges having to do with either tolerating or engaging in unorganized shirking or coordinated slowdowns and stoppages ring hollow, considering the standard operating procedures of the local prior to 1942. The local had internal machinery for handling work shirking, drunkenness, and other such infractions which were fairly common, and never previously handled by expulsion. Linstad

himself had been reprimanded not six months earlier for drinking on the job.⁴⁹⁶ As for slowdowns and strikes, there had never been a formal grievance procedure established with any employer until the concessionary GLTC contract written in Buffalo; instead, grievances were dealt with directly on the shopfloor by means of these direct tactics. Because domineering foremen and wage-chiseling stevedores were part of the fabric of social life on the waterfront, so too were the longshoremen's various job actions. The charge against Altman, Biddle, and Potter that they were agitating men with promises of back pay seems especially rich given the local's pending lawsuit against the GLTC on the 1000-hour law, planned openly and months in advance, designed precisely to win thousands of dollars in back pay.

A stronger case could be made on the charge of disloyalty, with regard to the men's support for the CIO, but again, the entire local was implicated in abetting the CIO's advance in their own maritime industry where the AFL was still active and signing up ship crews. Toliver's making positive comments about the CIO, or Altman and Potter's helping the CIO to organize a tannery, seem rather trifling by comparison. It is likewise implausible that "secret meetings" – no doubt a description of the practice of informal caucusing, with a vilifying spin – could be, in themselves, honestly interpreted as disloyal to the union or the members. It is also hard to imagine that the conservative group never spoke informally outside of meetings about what they planned to do at meetings. Indeed, the fact that much of Wagner's spoken testimony on April 30 seemed to be lifted verbatim from Brzek's written comments from April 17 suggests some degree of informal coordination. The charge of "disrupting the local" falls flat for the same reason; meeting disruptions were a perennial feature of the organizational life of the longshoremen, and dozens of men in good standing had been fined a dollar at some time or another for

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., November 7, 1941.

the charge. From the local's earliest days, marshals stood by at every meeting if the dollar fine failed to do the trick; you might be thrown out of the hall by your collar, but you were not expelled.

Even Toliver's public and well-known political alignments had seemed much less of a problem in the recent past. The grievance committee was created under Gust Bohn's presidency, and his appointment of Toliver as chairman gave him a seat on the executive board when he otherwise would not have had one. He had also regularly represented the union at various kinds of special and important meetings, apparently respected for his long tenure in leadership and "institutional knowledge" even when he was not among the elected officials. Most recently, he was part of the local's delegation to meet with Mayor Zeidler. For that matter, when it came to the recent crisis, there is every indication that he supported the adoption of a no-strike clause to coax the GLTC back to Milwaukee, just as his more conservative counterparts did.

In fact, the charges against the seven men conceal more than they reveal about the motivations for their expulsion. The real reasons are much more straightforward. One might imagine the three longshoremen on their way back to Milwaukee from Buffalo, taking stock of the situation in no particular order: Earlier that month, the mayor himself told them to their faces that the local's militant reputation was a liability, and that they needed to clean it up once and for all or else lose the GLTC work. In Buffalo, Hoopes could have just said that declining volume and rising costs made maintaining service at all major ports impossible, and that the ability of running the entire operation through a single dock at Chicago made it the better choice, and left it at that; instead, he upbraided them for having tolerated such irresponsible behavior on the part of their organization, and insisted -- irrespective of how true it was -- that labor unrest was a factor in the company's decision to make Chicago their only port of call in the southwestern corner of Lake Michigan. Any reconsideration of the question depended absolutely on a total restructuring of the local's relationship with waterfront employers. The loss of the GLTC work in

turn meant that the central base of the radicals was gone – Toliver, Johnson, Biddle, Altman, and Potter were regulars on the GLTC boats, Johnson and Biddle being sitting stewards. The membership would see that it was the way they ran those docks that drove the company away. The conservatives, for their part, had the total support of the international leadership in their efforts to win the boats back – Walton had expressed this much in person in Buffalo. Even the Federated Trades Council was aggressively isolating Toliver on the explicit grounds of his association with Communists, refusing to seat him as a delegate for Local 815.

In short, the local was there for the taking; the conservative faction had an opportunity to put a decisive end to the local's factionalism and assume unchallenged leadership of the organization. Indeed, rather than an opportunity, it must have seemed thrust upon them. They simply had no choice but to get the local "cleaned up once and for all," as the Hon. Mayor Zeidler had put it.

What, then, explained the anticommunist idiom by which the expulsions were carried out? It is too simple to say that anticommunism was *merely* a convenient rationalization for a decision ultimately driven by other motives. Certainly, as discussed in chapter 5, John Brzek was totally earnest in his anticommunism; there is no reason to doubt that the others were, as well. Instead, and especially in light of the GLTC's removal, the ideological framework of anticommunism enabled the conservative leadership to reinterpret what had been widespread and longstanding practices in the local – slowdowns and stoppages, some toleration of shirking, audacity toward management, informal caucusing, sympathy toward the CIO, disruptive behavior – as resulting from a conspiracy of a small dictatorial group who represented an existential threat to the local and to the livelihoods of the longshoremen.

The anticommunist frame also sharpened the moral urgency of meeting this threat by connecting the more quotidian fears of the longshoremen – unemployment, lost wages, the loss of their

organization, the return of the dreaded shape-up – to the defense of American liberty and loyalty to the nation in a time of war. Besides, the Milwaukee port was now itself a crucial part of the war effort, since the longshoremen handled ammunition and other finished materiel, as well as countless inputs to defense production. By this time, of course, the official Communist position was in enthusiastic agreement with the no-strike pledge and the notion of uninterrupted production for the duration. But for close observers of the Communists, this radical turn in policy was merely more evidence of their subordination of genuine principles to loyalty to a foreign government; for most others, it was likely neither here nor there. For the longshoremen, it was also too little and too late: the Communists – the distinction between bona fide members and sympathizers or fellow travelers being irrelevant here – had already brought the local to the brink of devastation, they were “proven” to be bad faith actors, and, of course, the waterfront’s biggest boss knew them well and would not consider bringing jobs back to the port until they were gone.

Aside from providing the conservatives with a symbolic basis to create a clear narrative of the local’s problems and their causes, anticommunism also acted on the local from outside in terms of the general ideological and political climate, weakening and isolating the left-wing group within Local 815. Brzek later noted, for example, the influence of the Milwaukee labor movement in the radicals’ ouster by way of the FTC’s refusal to seat Toliver, which served to confirm that he had become “known as an agitator and trouble-maker and was suspected of being Communist” in much wider circles than just the longshoremen. He added that the FTC were “die-hards...the old Socialist types who wouldn’t bend at all to the Commies”. Ray Taylor, longtime editor of the Milwaukee Labor Press, said of the overall

atmosphere that “it would have been impossible for a Communist-leaning labor leader to survive in Milwaukee”.⁴⁹⁷

The history of the Communist movement would suggest that the Party’s own twists and turns in policy contributed to the isolation of its activists in the movement. The key moment in this period would have been the August 1939 signing of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, which sent Comintern affiliates the world over – who thought of themselves as the tip of the spear in the international struggle against fascism – into disarray. In the United States, after briefly attempting to square the circle, the Party adopted the line that the war in Europe was merely “a struggle between two rival imperialist groups for the domination of the world”.⁴⁹⁸ On the national and international levels, this was a devastating blow to the Popular Front as a whole and the stature of the various Communist Parties within it. Further research is necessary to determine whether this played a role in driving the isolation of Communists and fellow travelers in Milwaukee. By the time the expulsions actually took place, the Party had since made a wild swing back to full-fledged support for the Allies; at the very least, the schizophrenic stance toward the war made Communists appear unreliable at best, and lent credence to the charge that everything they did was in the service of the Soviet Union. There is insufficient evidence to say whether the longshoremen were tuned into these questions of international policy, or whether the Party’s shifting line affected the stature of the radical faction in these years; it is easy to imagine, however, that the Party’s credibility in the labor movement at large took damage as a result.⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁷ Chybowski, 43.

⁴⁹⁸ Earl Browder, quoted in Isserman, 40.

⁴⁹⁹ Isserman, 32-54.

2.3. Aftermath

As for the Great Lakes Transit Company, by March 19 – hardly a week before the expulsions – Hoopes wrote to Commissioner Brockel to inform him they had concluded their cost studies based on the local's proposals and found that a reduction in labor costs at the Milwaukee port, even with an improvement in service, simply could not exceed the benefit of the continuous operation possible with Chicago's facilities. For the year, anyway, the question was settled. Apparently, no one told the longshoremen. Secretary Richards wrote to Hoopes on April 27, asking for information so that at least the local could plan for the season. He proudly assured him that he "would have a much more orderly operation here than in the past as we are continually receiving recommendations from different employers here for the good job the men are turning in". Presumably they got the memo soon after that and began looking to the next year. But all hope was crushed that summer; in July, the War Shipping Administration requisitioned the company's vessels for the war effort, putting an early end to the package freight business. Perhaps the failure of Local 815 as a radical formation was simply inevitable that year; on the other hand, if *that* had been the way the GLTC ships left Milwaukee, the radicals could hardly have been blamed.⁵⁰⁰

At any rate, Brzek became de facto president almost immediately, with Gust Bohn finding work in defense production. Under his leadership Local 815 was quickly transformed. Until this point, the organization had embodied a militant vision of unionism that upheld not only the racial integration of members and the executive leadership, but a direct exercise of workers' power by integrated work gangs, under an integrated layer of rank-and-file leaders. While it would be incorrect and presumptuous to claim that interracial conflict was *absent* from the society of the Milwaukee longshoremen, it is

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., Folder 6, Box 9, Hoopes to Brockel, March 19, 1942; Richards to Hoopes, April 27, 1942. Fletcher, "The Decline," 390.

difficult based on the record to sustain a narrative of the waterfront that says it was a world in which racial conflict was an essential, structural feature. The fact of a popular – or, at least, once-popular – black leader and a whole cadre of black stewards, all of whom waged significant control over access to work on the docks, no doubt gave little breathing room to the development of the sort of exclusionary, white supremacist union politics that characterized other longshore unions in New York or Los Angeles. When conflicts arose that seemed to bear some racist component, as with the Paul Marchwinski affair, an integrated group brought the charges against him, and an integrated group carried out the investigation; and ultimately, indeed, forced his resignation. When it came to the distribution of work, it would again be incorrect to say that there was no racial dynamic whatsoever; the marine warehouses were white when the local organized them, and the few men who had access to the steady jobs there were white. Still, the union took some action on this score as well, instituting a rotation system for the warehouse work at National Terminals that would allow previously excluded workers to start accumulating seniority in the houses.

After Brzek's ascent to the presidency, Local 815 did not drop the feature of being racially integrated; rather, it put an end to workers' power at the point of production. The same machinery that once enabled the local to protect workers who antagonized the foremen and stevedores was put to work instead in the pursuit of efficiency, reliability, and productivity. The most important single organizational reform was the elimination of the multiple-steward system which had given direct power over dock labor to a broader segment of the membership, and also gave that power a lower center of gravity, as it were, in the organization. With a steward for each gang, it was easier for a rank-and-file member to keep an eye on his own steward, for each steward to be held to account and influenced by a smaller number of men, and for a single gang to hold up an operation. The outright elimination of two-thirds of the boat gang stewards and as many as half of the car gang and warehouse stewards tended to

pull power further away from the rank-and-file, reduce their influence over stewards, and increase that of the executive.

This basic feature was intensified further with the expansion of Local 815B membership which, by a deal with Nugent's company in 1943, came to include the temporary, flexible labor force that the company contracted for work in the defense industries. This segment of the membership, like workers in the cement plants, had no stewards, and relied directly on the business agent for representation. Moreover, they had no real democratic rights as members, only the guarantee of prevailing wages at the plant in exchange for dues payments; from the local's perspective this group functioned mainly as a golden goose.⁵⁰¹

Thus, while the distribution of formal power in the local always gave the organization clearly authoritarian characteristics, there was, before 1942, a considerable devolution of the right to wage economic power on the docks down to the work gangs; the concentration of this power into the executive was the main result, and indeed the whole point, of the organizational reform.

After the purge of the left-wing, the local saw little open factional conflict, and the executive board remained highly stable throughout the late 1940s and 1950s, by which time the board was entirely white except for one member, even though the membership of the local was around 50 percent black by the 1950s. In this sense the leadership, if not the local, did "de-integrate" after the

⁵⁰¹ It must be said that this was not merely a money-grab, but an answer to a real dilemma faced by the local during the war years. Unlike the other coasts, the Great Lakes shipping economy did not see a wartime traffic increase except in iron ore; total tonnage, in fact, decreased. The war economy's pressing need for the rapid movement of commodities also intensified the competitive advantage of the railways over the boat lines. In this way the industry is an object lesson in the unevenness of development; while war production represented a massive boon for the general economic situation and for a wide array of industries, Harry Brockel worried publicly in 1943 that important lake terminal facilities would simply have to be abandoned if the war carried on much longer (Great Lakes Harbor Association Records, Folder 8, Box 1, "Great Lakes Harbors Meeting", reprinted report from *Traffic World Magazine*, February 6, 1943). Local 815 had to bear the burden of being left out of the defense boom; Nugent's temp business allowed them a little piece of it.

transformation. Authority was increasingly concentrated in the office of the business agent and the person of John Brzek. From the start of his term in the 1940s, Brzek worked closely with the stevedore contractors in evaluating longshore gangs and getting rid of shirkers; Brzek himself would often tell the employer that a man should not be employed, and he would refuse to address the grievances of men that he saw as unreliable or otherwise undesirable.

With the hiring hall system in place and now operating under the business union philosophy, the day-to-day functions of Brzek and the executive board in the Milwaukee port was more and more difficult to distinguish from that of the employer. On its own terms, the strategy was successful. Local 815's willingness to take on the tasks of management made the Milwaukee port more attractive to employers, and business at the port increased. As long as the local could credibly ensure employers that unproductive workers would be dealt with, they had some leverage to increase wages as well. Employment and incomes at the Port of Milwaukee steadily increased, although wages lagged far behind coastal longshoremen. Vrana points out that, by 1950, coastal contracts raised longshore wages nationally to a rate 25 percent higher than that paid to laborers, but Wisconsin's longshoremen still earned 25 percent *less* than the state's laborers by 1960. Unfortunately, I have no information as to how this compares to longshoremen's wages in the Great Lakes. But still by that time, the whole region was still unorganized.

Only in the early 1960s did serious discussion begin in the Great Lakes District about pattern bargaining. Brzek, by then an executive board member of the GLD, was an enthusiastic proponent of the effort, endorsing the 1960 wage parity campaign sponsored by the district. Back home in Milwaukee, however, he was still constrained by the old inter-port competition; while Milwaukee longshoremen would get the same wages as their counterparts elsewhere, he planned to reduce the size of a regular gang by two men so that the employers' overall wage bill was reduced. This was one of a few critical

tensions that would emerge during the business unionist phase of the local's history. Through his commitment to the interests of employers and the port, his competent management of the workforce, and his willingness to hold down labor costs just below competitors, Brzek had transformed labor's disorganization across ports from a weakness into a strength for the local. The growing interest in regional coordination, however, threatened to undermine this basic strategy.⁵⁰²

Another second source of rising tension was the growing restiveness of the membership. Brzek's soft touch with employers began to frustrate the longshoremen in the late Fifties and early Sixties, by which time the workforce had a significant proportion of young black men who were becoming impatient with their treatment on the docks by employer and union alike. Beginning with men like Milwaukee civil rights activist and dockworker William Mosby and later Jerry Brazil (who Brzek described as having "caused him more trouble than any other" member) leveled charges of discrimination in the hiring practices of the local. Most of the time these were dropped for lack of evidence, and Mosby later took back the charge explicitly, claiming that the seniority system that tended to favor the local's whites – by then overwhelmingly the old men of the docks – was fair. Still, it raises the question of how adequately such grievances were pursued by the union, and it would not be surprising to find that Brzek was predisposed not to push too hard on these cases. Brzek, indeed, tended to dismiss charges of discrimination as resulting simply from young men who had not yet put in their time and thought they ought to be able to skip ahead of other more experienced workers.⁵⁰³

Despite Brzek's attempts to ignore or shunt aside the question of discrimination, the younger dockworkers were lodging overwhelming numbers of complaints about the hiring hall's "stripe system" that Chybowski describes as penalizing absenteeism and giving the most senior men the best jobs but

⁵⁰² Vrana, 28-29.

⁵⁰³ Chybowski, 146.

also “left areas in which subjective judgement was used” on the part of the business agent.⁵⁰⁴ To try to defray the insurgency somewhat, Brzek had Mosby – whom he considered the leader of the new insurgency – placed in the union hall to help with handling the functions of the union administration, including processing grievances and hiring. But Mosby’s presence did not slow the stream of complaints coming from the membership.⁵⁰⁵ In another context, Brzek initiated a policy of outright discrimination on the docks, refusing to accept into the union Mexican workers who began to appear in Milwaukee in greater numbers in the Fifties. In a report to the executive board in 1954, he warned about problems of poor work performance, pilferage, and high turnover, adding that Mexicans were part of this trouble, and that if nothing was done about it the employers would attempt to assert their right to hire longshoremen directly. He later explained to Chybowski that he believed that the Mexicans might constitute “another disruptive faction” in the union, and that they “brought in a chemical that would cause an explosion... I didn’t need another faction”. In his original report he put it this way: “While I am in no way against Mexicans, I also feel no reason why we should have them, as up to this time we have not had them in this union. We had to accept some that are working steady in the cement plants. We find that this year we have all the Gonzales’s, Jose’s, and Carlos’s on the south side reporting here [for longshore work], and as far as I know their reputation is not good when it comes to trouble”. As the principle of interracial unionism goes, here was an abysmal reversal.⁵⁰⁶

After years of complaints about Brzek’s job as business agent, and after warnings from even the local’s lawyers that Brzek was getting dangerously close to “doing the employers’ work,” in 1966 the

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 151.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., 150.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., 55-56. It was not unprecedented for interracial unions to target other groups for exclusion; Letwin, for example, describes black and white coal miners uniting to keep Italian migrant workers out of the mines (73). In this case, however, there is no indication of “unity” around the question, per se; rather it appears to a policy established unilaterally by the business agent.

local voted to turn over the hiring hall *to the employers*. Complaints about his performance as business agent kept coming, however; in particular, and in a show of intra-ILA solidarity uncharacteristic of the local, members felt Brzek's deals with employers were unfair to ILA longshoremen in Chicago, and that Brzek's work gang reduction was undermining their contracts. They were also frustrated by Brzek's insistence that union members carry port security cards – this being an anticommunist holdover from the early days of his administration instituted “in order to keep undesirables off the port”.

By the late Sixties, Brzek's control over the local had been reduced considerably, and he was sharing the board with several of his opponents. Still, he handily won reelection for business agent in 1968, 144 for Brzek, 40 for Peter Kalil, one of the local's insurgent members, and a remaining 29 votes split between two other candidates. Even more significant was that this was the first time since taking office in 1942 that Brzek had ever been challenged in an election. While he would win an election again in 1970 against Jerry Brazil, Brzek's undisputed control over the local was slipping away.

Finally, on October 19, 1971 – close to the winter closing of the St. Lawrence seaway, and therefore a critical time for employers to get the cargo moved through – the old spirit of Local 815 broke through again when workers wildcatted, striking an employer who put a skilled winchman on a forklift truck job, a lower-paying position. After the strike was underway, the workers generated a list of thirty-one grievances to be presented to the employer. Brzek attempted to get the longshoremen back to work immediately but was unable to do so; the wildcat lasted for three days, and members only voted to end it when they were threatened with heavy fines by a court injunction obtained by the employers. Indeed, militant interracial unionism had returned to the docks. By the early Seventies, some 90 percent of the longshore workforce was black, but a recent influx of young white men, many of them hippies and

young radicals for whom the freedom to come and go allowed them to follow their other pursuits, introduced a layer of white supporters to the largely black insurgency.⁵⁰⁷

Regretfully I have not yet been able to find this list of thirty-one grievances, which I believe could provide enormous insight as to race relations on the docks in this era. The best report on the wildcat was published in the Milwaukee Yippie publication *Kaleidoscope*, with which a few of the white longshoremen were involved.⁵⁰⁸ The report by “Steve A. Dore”, pseudonym of 815 member Steve Cole, said the grievances “ranged from violations of the contract, like failure of the company to give hide pay and washup time, to unsafe working conditions like slippery decks and inadequate safety nets”. The strikers also demanded other health and safety measures, like “having a doctor on the decks at all times, and that men should be allowed to get replacements for work after 6 pm when they become sick during the day”. Moreover, “verbal insults and belittlement were to stop”. The author made no specific reference to racism, but notes that “if leadership couldn’t come from the designated officials it came, nevertheless, mostly from blacks well respected on the waterfront. The younger whites, many freeks [sic] from the East side, were almost 100% for the strike. Many old timers said they should have done this years ago”.⁵⁰⁹

The wildcat strike was a signal to Brzek and to the employers that he lost his grip on the docks. After the strike, Brzek’s influence over the members and the rest of the executive board rapidly declined. Finally, in 1973, he quit his job as business agent for 815, becoming the business agent for (the all-white) Local 1014 in Green Bay.

⁵⁰⁷ Zetteler, “Sacks and Violence”.

⁵⁰⁸ “Yippies” referred to those associated with the Youth International Party (YIP), a radical political current within the broader countercultural movement of the late Sixties and early Seventies. YIP was not a party *per se*, as it had no formal structure or membership; it was more of a cultural formation identifiable by a shared aesthetic and sense of humor that distinguished itself from the “hippie” counterculture by its commitment to political activity.

⁵⁰⁹ Steve A. Dore, “Dock Strike,” *Kaleidoscope* 105 (1971): 3. “Hide pay” refers to the wage premium paid for the handling of leather hides.

Chapter 8: Historical and Theoretical Interpretations of the Case

The four case study chapters starting with Chapter 4 aim not merely to create an interesting narrative about a little-known case, but to use micro-level historical empirical data to derive insights both at a more abstract theoretical level about the interconnection of race and class in capitalist society, and at the level of an historical interpretation of race and class in the New Deal and World War II eras. At the beginning of this work, I pose the questions: “What accounts for the general failure of unions in the US to maintain a tradition of militant, interracial solidarity, and what are the implications of that failure?” The sociological and historical literature has already supplied a wide range of pretty successful answers, as I suggest in chapter 2. But carving out questions more appropriate to the case revealed the necessity of explaining not merely the problem of failure, but first how interracial solidarity *succeeded*, and how it came about that a successful case, in the end, failed; what exactly the nature of that failure was; and what it tells us about race and class in history and in theory.

1. Summing up the case

A brief recapitulation of the argument with respect to the case: First, the enabling conditions of, and constraints on, interracial solidarity rooted in the social, political, and economic characteristics of the men. Here, the existing literature on interracial solidarity and conflict is broadly consistent with the account of its emergence on the Milwaukee waterfront. Chapter 4 weighed various factors derived from this literature: the unique social experience of longshoremen, their marginalization from mainstream social life and their resultant attachment to their unions; patterns of wage inequality and the question of the split labor market; the dependence in some industries of immigrant workers on black leadership on account of linguistic and cultural barriers; demographic characteristics of worksites at the time of unionization; the political geography of race and whether subordinated racial groups have opportunities

for independent organizing, and some others. A comparison of Milwaukee longshoremen's wages showed an absence of a split labor market in waterfront labor, this being a key "negative" factor in the sense of at least weakening the potential for outright conflict identified by Bonacich and adopted and elaborated by Boswell et al. The emergence of a black working-class urban politics in the Sixth Ward – at least partially independent *both* of white political organizations, as well as of elite and professional black groups – was a key "positive" factor, building a layer of black proletarian leadership in the community who were prepared to apply their skills in political organization and communication in industry, partially confirming the theoretical positions of Gerteis and Virdee. Put in terms of the 2x2 table in Chapter 2 (Figure 4), the story of the emergence of militant interracial solidarity on the waterfront was one of how patterns of racial formation affect class formation (put simply, how race affects class) by enhancing the potential for solidarity. Of course, a prior process whereby race affected class in this way was the pervasive racism in industrial and manufacturing employment in Milwaukee that concentrated black workers into the worst paid, most dangerous, and least stable jobs; one reason that it would have been difficult to exclude black workers from the waterfront was that they had already been excluded from so many other occupations, and rather than there being a number of black longshoremen proportionate to the small size of the black population in the city as a whole, there was a massive concentration. Overcoming the resistance of over a third of the workforce to their exclusion from the waterfront would have been a much heavier lift than keeping out a percentage or two; besides which, the employers would likely not have simply accepted such a tightening of the labor supply without opposition.

At the same time, however, extreme wage inequality among longshoremen would tend to make solidarity, interracial or otherwise, weaker. Furthermore, unlike the stereotype of the nomadic longshoreman, the men of Local 815 were (and were increasingly) rooted in Milwaukee, and so highly dependent on their particular job, and less likely to have the option of chasing work around the

country.⁵¹⁰ This admittedly remains at the level of conjecture, and is rooted not in an empirical comparison but in a simple rational actor assumption and *ceteris paribus* logic: all else equal, a worker's concern to avoid the risk of being fired is in proportion to their assessment of the potential costs – the anticipated period of unemployment and the value of lost wages, the costs of relocating, and so on. Still, the role of the longshoremen's lifestyle is invoked enough in the history of waterfront unionism that I thought it worth submitting this as a plausible contributing factor to the peculiar development of Local 815.

Second, Chapter 5 identifies the two principle contending visions of trade unionism on the Milwaukee waterfront. I argue that "interracial working-class solidarity" is broad enough to encompass a sufficiently wide range of social phenomena which in fact must be distinguished, because they originate from distinct causes and represent dissimilar dynamics and trajectories. Put another way, the phrase "interracial working-class solidarity" is clear enough about *who* is involved in some class project but not *what* they are actually doing. Yet what they are actually doing bears intimately on the problem of the project's prospects, the constraints and opposition it will face, and its affects both in terms of class and racial formation. It is one thing to manage to get white and black workers to pay monthly dues to the

⁵¹⁰ This has not been emphasized in this work, but the notion that Milwaukee longshoremen were by and large stable family men first appears explicitly in John Brzek's typed minutes of the 1941 arbitration meeting between Local 815 and Hansen Storage and National Terminal in the wake of the GLTC lockout. It was an argument deployed by Aaron Toliver as to why the companies should grant a wage increase (the two men, as vice president and president, respectively, comprised the union's arbitration committee). Brzek wrote, "Toliver explained that several years ago the men that worked the docks were drifters, whereas the men that have these jobs now are mostly men with families and responsibilities". As president and business agent, Brzek would make the "family men" claim a mainstay of his argument as to why longshoremen should have annual wage increases. It also formed a part of his case to employers as to why they could expect reliable service – these are men who have wives and children to feed, they are not looking for trouble. The *Sentinel's* 1959 series on Brzek and the longshoremen amplified the same argument, and also revealed the increase of "family men" as an *aspirational*, not merely descriptive, feature of the local. This strikes me as an interesting lead on the question of work and gender, and the changing constructions of manhood and masculinity among longshoremen (ILA 815 Records, Folder 4, Box 10, "Arbitration meeting", May 21, 1941. *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 1959: "Good Labor Relations Bode Well," June 22, p. 1; "More Family Men' Is Goal," June 26, p. 10).

same bargaining agent; it would seem quite another for white and black workers to work side-by-side, engage in frequent and routine actions against management on one another's behalf, or support anti-oppression campaigns outside the workplace. By a strictly who-is-involved criterion, Local 815 is clearly interracial both pre- and post-coup; yet these are clearly, in an equally important sense, two different organizations. This is why throughout the work I often refer use the modifier *militant*, lacking a better shorthand to identify the character of a project rather than merely the racial characteristics of its participants, to describe just what failed in this case.

The two biographical sketches of Aaron Toliver and John Brzek exemplified two distinct ideologies of unionism which drove two divergent trajectories of class formation – one replaced by the other. Toliver's vision embodied a class-struggle unionism: building an organization that harnessed workers' power at the point of production, took an adversarial posture toward employers, refused to adopt as an absolute principle management's right to manage, and encouraged coalitions and broader social movement activity for the pursuit of workers' interests outside the workplace. Members of such a union are often encouraged to widen their imagined "community of fate", and to think of themselves not merely in narrow occupational terms but in expansive, even abstract, class terms.⁵¹¹ At the time, such a project was strongly associated in general with the great industrial union upsurge, and especially with the CIO. Not that the CIO *tout court* always embodied these principles in every case, but they had long been a part of the industrial union movement, and in the Thirties bloomed under the CIO's aegis. This vision of unionism was connected to a transformative project that reached far into the future. For the historical advocates of industrial unionism, the latter was a means to achieve the industrial commonwealth, or what later advocates would call industrial democracy. Workers defending these

⁵¹¹ The idea "community of fate" – the group of people who union members perceive their own interests to align with – comes from Ahlquist and Levi, 2.

principles and acting in accordance with them took part in this long-term project, however dimly or surely they were aware of it. As James Boggs put it in a more updated vernacular: “The CIO movement gave the American public its first real taste of class consciousness and social thinking, establishing in the American mind for the first time the idea of democracy on the job, in the factories, in the offices, and every place where people work.... The CIO, in conjunction with the war and the activities of the Negroes themselves, established a framework within which Negroes could fight for equality inside the plant.... It was the CIO movement...which established the production worker as a citizen of American society rather than just a beast of burden”. Toliver’s association with the CIO and its local leaders was thus especially significant.⁵¹²

Brzek’s vision, on the other hand, embodied business unionism: a basic acceptance of the employers’ right to manage, the promotion of industrial peace and collaboration across the labor-management divide, and an abiding aloofness toward broader social questions. According to this vision, the union’s task is the pursuit of workers’ interests within the constraints imposed by the employers’ requirement to turn a profit and desire to thrive in the face of their competition.⁵¹³ There is a far-reaching vision here, as well: peaceful class collaboration, bound by some principle of distributive justice that ensures workers a “fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work”, in perpetuity. Disruptive tactics such as strikes are not out of the question, but they are extreme, and their use is to be strictly relegated to carefully defined circumstances. Brzek’s vision of unionism may have been informed by Catholic social doctrine, which counseled peace, moderation, fairness, and honesty in relations among classes; no

⁵¹² Boggs (Ward, ed.), 96-97.

⁵¹³ The calling card of business unionism is its *principled acceptance* of these constraints, and its adoption of the employers’ interests as the union’s own. The perennial tension in radical, class-struggle unionism is that the constraints operate irrespective of whether one accepts them, that they are essentially *political*, and that no form of economic organization is sufficient to overcome them – they cannot, in other words, be broken by the exercise of workers’ economic power at the point of production alone.

doubt it was also informed by the circumstances imposed on the longshoremen by the decline of the package freight industry on the Great Lakes, the effects of the sudden departure of the Great Lakes Transit Corporation, and the reasons they gave Local 815 for choosing Local 19 over them. In this respect, Brzek offered a bleaker vision than Toliver's: one disciplined by, and he would certainly argue better suited to, the realities of job insecurity, economic vulnerability, and inter-port competition. Under such conditions, promises of workers' power on the job were foolish and dangerous; the purpose of the union was not to fundamentally alter class relations, but to make the job a little safer and a little better paid than it was last year. In 1942, there can be no doubt that, of the two competing visions, this one must have seemed the more sensible.

Chapters 6 and 7 spelled out the history of Local 815 from 1934 to 1942. I argued that a genuine militant rank-and-file union emerged among the longshoremen in the context of a major maritime strike in the Great Lakes among the ILA tugboat men from Chicago to Buffalo. The Milwaukee tugboat men went along with the strike, but took little interest in it; however, perhaps judging them a more enthusiastic set, the ILA took an interest in the Milwaukee longshoremen. Simultaneously the cataclysmic West Coast ILA strike broke out, ending in the adoption of the hiring hall system for the longshoremen there, and no doubt serving as a direct inspiration to their Milwaukee counterparts.

Apart from the context of the general upsurge, disorganization among waterfront employers played to the longshoremen's favor, and militant tactics won the day, whipping waterfront bosses into quick voluntary recognition of the union. Before long, the longshoremen had a hiring hall and were in control of the waterfront's labor supply. They spread around that control by means of the multiple-steward system, creating a thick layer of rank-and-file leadership in the union in which stewards had considerable direct authority. At this point, the biggest problems in securing militant interracial solidarity had been solved, and the waterfront appeared poised to become an island of proletarian racial

harmony compared to the racist exclusions in the manufacturing industries and the advancing process of black ghettoization in the city: employers could not readily divide-and-conquer workers because they did not control hiring or dismissals; meanwhile, if a white worker looked to stir up racial conflict, agitate for a whites-only program for the docks, or otherwise push white supremacist politics, his steward – not infrequently a black worker – had full authority to knock him off the job for “disruption” or whatever other charge he thought appropriate. That the men were protected by the hiring hall system also meant that it was not too difficult for a rank-and-file worker simply to stop and get the steward’s attention or for that matter attempt to deal with the situation himself, which no doubt would get the steward’s attention at any rate. The matter would go up to the board, whose leading officer was unlikely to have much sympathy for such behavior, and who could usually mete out whatever sanction they wanted to. In other words, whatever threat whiteness and white supremacy represented for solidarity, it was balanced considerably by the power black workers wielded. I should reiterate here that these are hypothetical examples – in fact, there were no entries in the minutes apart from the Marchwinski affair that even hint at racial conflict.

Yet this formation was beset by various problems from the beginning that would ultimately lead to its unraveling, ranging from overwhelming external threats to unforced errors. By far the most basic cause of the local’s sharp turn to business unionism was the nature of the Great Lakes shipping industry itself. The shipment of general cargo, or package freight, and automobiles supplied most of the work for longshoremen, and was already a narrower proportion of the overall freight movement on the Lakes than in any of the other three major coasts. More importantly, the package freight industry on the lakes had been in decline for years, with the advantages of rail and then especially trucking for the movement of these commodities overwhelming those the lake movement could provide. Finally, almost all the interlake package freight trade was under the near-monopoly of the Great Lakes Transit Corporation;

from Milwaukee's perspective this was a total monopoly, since the smaller Minnesota-Atlantic did not run any routes through Lake Michigan. This situation – plus the fact that the GLTC's contractor was the largest single employer of longshoremen in the port – made the radical project for Local 815 extremely vulnerable to the threat of disinvestment by a single company who was already operating at a loss in a dying trade. As far as the region is concerned, the GLTC's monopolistic position put it at a major advantage by enabling it to force ports to compete for its business. This was a fundamental cause of decline because the conditions it imposed on the waterfront were likely to foil the radical project *in any case*, even if events had not gone precisely as they did.

Still, Toliver's vision might have at least lasted longer and established itself as a more robust tradition on the Milwaukee waterfront if not for certain other factors imposed, not just by the structure of class relations in the industry, but by the previous history of working-class formation – in other words, the organizational characteristics and practices of the ILA that were already the fact of the matter by the time the longshoremen organized in 1934. Of course, the concentrated and arbitrary character of formal authority *within* the local made it so that the same machinery the radicals once controlled could summarily throw them out of the organization once the conservatives captured it, and without any binding local constitution or bylaws carefully outlining precise criteria for expulsion or rights of appeal, the expelled radicals simply had no recourse. In this respect, one of the organizational pillars of the radicals' influence was also their undoing. But more importantly, the Great Lakes ILA as a whole had long been committed to a principle of local autonomy in contract bargaining; in the context of the intense inter-port competition resulting from the structure of the industry, the Great Lakes District and its locals chose to relate to one another largely with indifference or hostility. The radicals in Milwaukee, for all their willingness to demonstrate solidarity with other groups of workers, apparently never attempted to settle their differences with Local 19 in Chicago – precisely the group of workers with

whom an alliance offered the most strategic value, by far, although the reasons for this may have been rooted in a political divide between them rather than mere economic competition. Finally, this local autonomy for contracts did not extend to locals' internal political affairs, into which the international leadership could easily intervene. In the event, Joseph Ryan assigned Richard Walton to handle and oversee the expulsion of the radicals.

That brings us to the matter of the factional struggle itself, the final causal piece of the story. While the radical faction was clearly dominant through 1938, and probably still held the advantage until the end of the navigation season in 1941, there was always a significant degree of support for the more conservative vision. No doubt the economic conditions of job insecurity and low wages, facts of life on the waterfront throughout the local's history, always helped to sustain a more cautious and moderate mood among some of the longshoremen. During and after 1939, however, the factional dispute had gone well past the matter of practical economic strategies or even competing visions of trade unionism, rising – from the perspective of the conservative group – to the level of a struggle against Communist subversion. In this the conservative faction was abetted by the intensification of anticommunism in the general political climate. The AFL was already doing its part to ice Toliver out of the city's labor movement; once the GLTC announced they would not be calling at Milwaukee, the local's conservatives also had the support of the city government, the employers, and the ILA in purging the radicals. The anticommunist frame allowed the conservatives to engage in a retrospective reinterpretation of almost any kind of activities that the radicals had been involved in. To give a speech at a May Day rally, encourage a slowdown on the docks, or express verbal support for the CIO – these and more could now serve as proof of disloyalty.

My analysis of the post-1942 situation, suggested at the end of Chapter 7, holds that what was really crucial about this transformation as it bears on the question of race relations was not how it was

caused by some racial dynamic – a white backlash against integration, a shoring-up of the identity of whiteness, the formation of a split labor market – but rather that the organizational and political-ideological processes that shifted Local 815 from one trajectory of class formation to another *affected* racial dynamics. First, the anticommunist campaign against Aaron Toliver, waged first outside the local but then culminating in his expulsion, isolated a major local black leader from the broader labor movement and then severed him from his own interracial constituency among the longshoremen. Second, the hard turn to business unionism and the hollowing-out of the steward system stripped black (along with white) rank-and-file workers of the power they had by virtue of their *class* position – or more accurately, made it more difficult and considerably riskier for them to exercise that power. Rather than the union functioning as a vehicle for black workers’ power and the development of a broader layer of black proletarian leadership, it came to function largely as the labor management department of the Port of Milwaukee. The basis of its success was the business agent’s assurance to employers that the longshoremen – increasingly black as time went on – would accept a lower wage rate and a sped-up labor process compared to other ports in exchange for their business; and, most importantly, that if they sought to use their power, they would be taken off the job and replaced by another union longshoreman.

2. Theoretical conclusions

This work has been concerned, in general, with the theoretical problem of the interconnection of race and class and, in particular, with the problem of the reasons for the failure of militant interracial class formation in American life. I have not posed an *alternative* explanation as against those summarized in Chapter 2 (section 3); rather, I have identified a particular case which does represent an instance of failed militant interracial unionism, but which none of these other explanations fits very well. The reason

for the poor fit, I argue, is that it is a case in which one gets the same outcome – failed militant interracial unionism – but by a causal path that begins and ends, as it were, with class. The failure of racial solidarity is typically thought of as the outcome of a process whereby race affects class by some or another mechanism of the sort described in Chapter 2. In some respects, this case presents a much more banal story. Militant interracial unionism failed on account of the quite general problems for class formation posed by capitalist class relations in general – the more or less intense fragmentation and competition for wages and employment among workers in general, generated in turn by the more or less chaotic patterns of investment determined by competition among capitalists – and the particular problems of the structure of class relations in Great Lakes shipping in particular – the secular decline of the industry, the overwhelming power of a single employer, and so on.

In the course of the argument, however, I made two other claims: first, the causes for the rise of militant interracial solidarity are found not only in the class dynamics of the place and time, but also in racial dynamics. To wit, an antecedent of its emergence on the waterfront was the previous history of independent black political organization in the Sixth Ward, and in particular of black proletarian political organization. This is the history best told in Trotter's *Black Milwaukee*; and theoretical arguments regarding the role of independent black (or 'racialized other') organization as a basis for interracial working class political traditions is laid out in Gerteis and Virdee. The idea that the existing racial composition of the waterfront at the time of organization lent itself to interracial rather than exclusivist strategies recalls arguments by Jones about lumber workers and Letwin about miners; the explanation for this fact of the waterfront, in turn, was the overall pattern of racist exclusion in the city's labor markets. Finally, the thesis laid out by Boswell et al. – that interracial solidarity emerges where there is an absence of a racially split labor market *and* where the union adopts an affirmative action policy,

integrating black workers into the leadership structure and organizing staff of local unions – is confirmed insofar as there clearly *was* such an integration in Local 815’s leadership from the earliest record. It is unknown, however, whether Thomas Brennan, the white organizer sent by the ILA to Milwaukee, adopted any deliberate strategy to recruit black leaders, or whether instead the native rank-and-file organizing committees were already integrated groups. In other words, while I explain the failure of militant interracial unionism almost entirely in terms of “race-neutral” *class* dynamics, the explanation for its success in the first place must refer to various kinds of racial dynamics.

Second, I argued that what was really crucial about the outcome of the case of Local 815 was not the imposition of racial segregation or exclusion in the waterfront labor market, but a redistribution of power away from the longshoremen in general. The case demonstrates in miniature the way that the outcomes of class struggles transform class formations – as Local 815 went from a class struggle organization, democratic in crucial respects, to a labor management department largely divorced from democratic control – and class structures – as the balance of power shifted decisively toward waterfront employers and the low-wage character of longshore labor in Milwaukee (relative both to other laborer class locations in the city, and relative to longshore jobs elsewhere) was locked in. But I suggested as well that this outcome had distinct effects as well on *racial* dynamics, seeing as a disproportionate and growing share of the waterfront workforce was black; in other words, these transformations in class relations on the waterfront were disproportionately, and then primarily, endured by black people. The local had once been a site of the production and development of black proletarian leadership in the city, potentially a vehicle for the pursuit of their political projects; after 1942, it became part of the structure of their disempowerment.

In other words, looking backwards and forwards from the moment of the purge of the left and the organizational reforms of the spring of 1942, one finds the causal arrow between class and racial dynamics going in both directions – race affects class, class affects race. The reciprocal or recursive causality of class and race is hardly a new idea, and indeed at this point the analyst, having found all manner of mechanisms whereby race affects class and others whereby class affects race, might be tempted to stop the theoretical investigation here. The matter is settled as to whether class or race is more “fundamental” – they are co-equal, the diversity of mechanisms indicating their essential context-dependency. One might conclude after all that there can be no *general* claims about the race-class interaction, no bigger theoretical puzzle to organize the irreducibly empirical pieces.

The task of the theorist, however, is to make sense of the empirical complexity of the world, not to surrender to it. At the end of Chapter 2, I argued that the racial capitalism framework represents a fruitful social-historical research program that attempts to identify and elaborate race-class interconnections in various historical contexts, and especially to articulate at the theoretical level processes of both class and racial oppression, formation, and struggle. The aim of the framework has mainly been to uncover ways that “racial hierarchies can be functional for capitalist social orders”, and vice-versa. Indeed, most other works in this vein have been considerably more ambitious than this one, pitching the question at national and international levels, and at much greater temporal dimensions. The literature is highly varied in terms of scholars’ specific claims, but I would propose this as a general gloss on the framework’s core intuition: Racism is a durable feature of capitalist societies and a capitalist world order because it resolves problems endemic to capitalist social relations. Working classes who are discontented can by race be divided; colonial plunder, which might otherwise offend liberal sensibilities, can be framed as the natural order or even as humanitarian intervention.

One of the central ambiguities in this formulation is whether what is proposed is merely the elaboration of a functional *description* of race or if, more provocatively, it is a functional *explanation*. It has not been uncommon for analysts to reach a convincing functional description of some phenomenon – e.g., that racism stabilizes capitalist class relations by dividing discontented workers – and claim that they have thereby achieved a functional explanation – that racism’s existence (or, better, persistence) can be *explained* somehow, by that effect. In radical circles, both activist and academic, one may hear a colleague or comrade say that racism is *necessary* for capitalism, that capitalism *requires* racism. What is usually suggested by such statements is a functional explanation, and in fact a very strong one: racism exists because, without its effects, capitalism *could not survive*; its effect is that capitalism is able to survive, and therefore capitalism continually rustles up racism as a survival strategy. That strong claim is perfectly appropriate to the activist setting for the sake of maximizing rhetorical force while preserving a fundamental kernel of truth, but it is reasonable, in my view, to modify it for the academic discussion: rather than saying that racism persists because is *necessary* for capitalism to exist, we might begin instead with the moderated position that racism persists because it serves to *optimize* capitalism by making it more stable, more robust to its inherent tendency to generate social conflicts.

Even this moderated functionalist claim is very tricky to establish. In the following section, I discuss the criteria that must be met to move past mere functional description to functional explanation of race, and then compare it to other possible forms of explanation of the race-class linkage, before situating the case of Local 815 and my own theoretical findings in connection with its historical development. I leave aside the question of why race, rather than some other axis of social differentiation, deserves pride of place as the central functional phenomenon at the heart of the framework, having offered some justifications for this in the brief discussion in Chapter 2.

2.1. On functionalism

For a functionalist explanation to succeed, it is not enough merely to point out the usefulness of some phenomenon to some system. It may well be the case that racial division is useful for the stabilization of capitalist class relations because it frustrates working-class solidarity, maintains a precarious and vulnerable reserve army of labor, and encourages cross-class identification between white workers and white employers. But that racial division has beneficial effects for capitalist class relations does not necessarily imply that racial division exists *because* of those effects. For a functionalist explanation to stand, a mechanism, some causal link, must be specified that connects racism's effect of stabilizing capitalism back to racism's own reproduction. The basic form that the functionalist explanation takes is represented in Figure 9 below: Capitalism is not an inherently stable system because the exploitative class relations that define it generate tension (T) in the structure. The level of conflict varies, sometimes rising very high; yet the capitalist class structure remains more or less stable. That this is true implies some "compensating causal loop" whereby some other structure, in this case racism, acts to maintain the stability (S) of the capitalist class structure; and racism (or some other functional structure) is maintained, or reproduced, by some selective process (R) originating from the capitalist class structure, such that, for instance, an increase in T drives an increase in R because of the latter's effect in increasing S .⁵¹⁴

There are thus three basic criteria which the functionalist explanation must meet. (1) It must be established that there really is some systematic and inherent source of instability (T) for capitalism – where there are no basic problems that need solving, there can be no selection pressure driving the

⁵¹⁴ This characterization of the form of functional explanation comes from Stinchcombe (1968, 88-89). The figure is based on an unpublished paper by David Calnitsky and me (2020).

emergence and reproduction of functional structures. (2) It must be shown that the supporting structure, racism in this case, really does act to stabilize or enhance the operation of capitalism, rather than being incidental or even dysfunctional to it. (3) It must be shown that there really is some process whereby capitalist class structures “select” racist structures, or put another way, tend to reproduce rather than erode them. This third criterion tends to be the most demanding on the analyst.

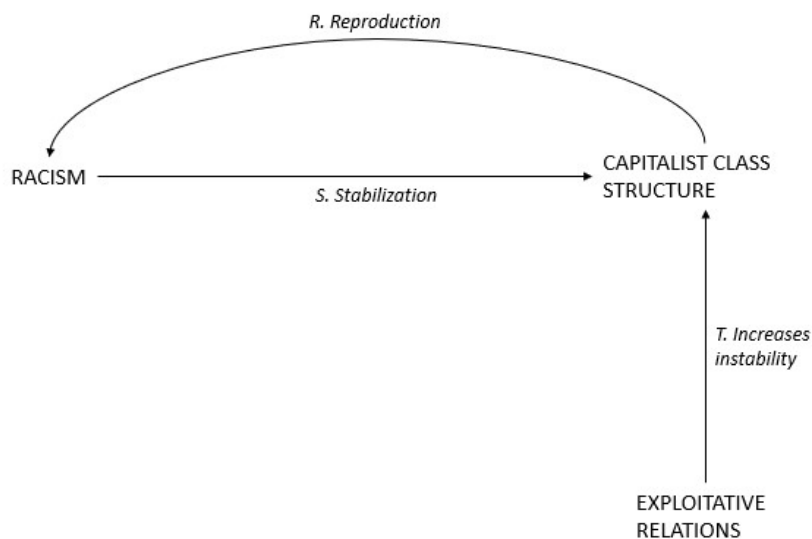


Figure 7. The form of a functionalist explanation for racism.

It is useful to elaborate the discussion with Elster’s approach to functionalist explanation, as he proposes the strictest set of conditions on these three criteria that must be satisfied for an explanation to properly count as functional. For Elster, “an institution or a behavioral pattern X is explained by its function Y for group Z if and only if: (1) Y is an effect of X; (2) Y is beneficial for Z; (3) Y is unintended by the actors producing X; (4) Y (or at least the causal relationship between X and Y) is unrecognized by the

actors in Z; (5) Y maintains X by a causal feedback loop passing through Z".⁵¹⁵ To cite the classic case, set X to some rule of thumb about levels of output used by firms in a market, Y to profit-maximization or competitiveness, and Z to the relevant firms: Factories are big (have high output) because bigness makes them more competitive. They are not big fundamentally because their owners *decided* that they ought to be big; this would be a standard causal-cum-intentional explanation (i.e., one variety of a non-functional causal explanation), but in the functionalist explanation the owners might as well be entirely clueless – indeed, according to Elster's criteria, they must be clueless if this is to count as a genuine functionalist explanation. Instead, factories are big because bigness leads to greater competitiveness through economies of scale. There is a structural selection process that feeds back: small firms die out on account of being outcompeted, big firms are left standing.⁵¹⁶

Very few examples from social science pass muster by these criteria. To clarify the logic of the explanation, consider the concept of a "local maximum." Taking a given context for granted, we can ask which traits or features best increase the odds of reproducing some structure. Consider the social practice of hazing: Why is hazing such a regular feature of fraternities, criminal gangs, sports teams, military units, and other such groups? The functional explanation says that hazing exists (X) because of its beneficial effects for the group (Z); namely, it enhances solidarity and group cohesion (Y). Perhaps

⁵¹⁵ Jon Elster, *Ulysses and the Sirens: Studies in Rationality and Irrationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 28. Compare these criteria to Stinchcombe's (1968) treatment of selection mechanisms in functionalist explanation, which allow all manner of selection processes, including intentional action. For instance: "Behavior may be selected by its consequences being what people want, so that they plan their behavior to get the consequences" (86). The criterion of unintentionality is dealt with below.

⁵¹⁶ Elster writes that this explanation of firm size is the *only* functionalist argument he knows of in the social sciences that meet all five conditions. He identifies several types of inadequate functionalist arguments in the social sciences based on which of the five conditions they satisfy or do not. One brand satisfies (1), (3), and (4) and fallaciously concludes therefrom the satisfaction of (2) and (5); another satisfies (1)-(4) and fallaciously concludes the satisfaction of (5); Marxist versions of functionalism satisfy (2), (3), and (4) and shift the claim to center around *long-term* effects. Explanations satisfying (1)-(4), as well as those satisfying (1)-(3) and (5), are what Elster, following Nozick, calls *invisible hand* and *filter* explanations, respectively, and are legitimate, but non-functional, forms of explanation.

this is because hazing functions as a harrowing “rite of passage” into the group that all group members recognize as an experience shared among only themselves and not anyone outside the group.

Therefore, some level of hazing enhances group cohesion, and groups with higher levels of coherence are more likely to survive over time. Groups with too little hazing will have lower chances of social reproduction; and perhaps groups with excessively severe hazing rituals will also hurt their relative chances of social reproduction as the ritual dissuades potential joiners. We would be left with a “local maximum” of some optimal level of hazing ritual severity, explained by the effects hazing rituals have on the relative chances of social reproduction of groups. Other examples along these lines can be identified. Certain typical levels of social isolation (X) imposed by cults (Z) on their members can be explained by their effect of reducing the possible exit strategies of members (Y); an optimal level of isolationist practice is “fit” to the structure. The practice of tithing (X) in religious groups (Z) might be explained by how it furnishes the material resources all organizations require (Y) to survive over time.

These examples all make use of selection mechanisms: the existence of a particular trait (firm size, hazing ritual, isolationist practices, tithing) can be explained by the effect the trait has on increasing the likelihood of survival of the firm/group/structure; those firms/groups/structures lacking the trait die out, are conquered, or join more successful groups. Organizations and institutions often compete for members and supporters, and functional-evolutionary arguments work well in these cases; but what about whole societies? Are there sufficient similarities between whole systems and organizations to make similarly functional arguments?

There are two approaches to deal with this. One approach would be to appeal to a counterfactual of other possible system-level configurations to provide an explanation; a second is to allow for some intentionality in the functional explanation, relaxing Elster’s third and fourth conditions. To understand these two approaches, take another classic example in the literature, Malinowski’s

analysis of the fishing rituals of Trobriand Islanders, this example again from Stinchcombe.⁵¹⁷ The puzzle is this: What explains the fact that the Islanders perform fishing rituals before fishing on the open sea, but not before fishing at the lagoon nearer to shore? The rituals exist because of their effects: they increase confidence and reduce fear. It is dangerous to fish at sea, but not in the lagoon; whether or not it was intended, the rituals have the objective effect of reducing fear, thereby facilitating fishing and locking the practice in place. Notice that this example does not work as nicely as the firm size or cult examples. It is missing something: the crucial selection process, the mechanism that “locks” the practice in place, is ambiguous.

In the first approach, as noted above, we posit a counterfactual environment of roads not taken. Of course, there is a difference between a factual environment of competing social organizations and a counterfactual environment of organizational roads not taken. We can, however, suppose that there *were* in fact multiple social groups, and surmise that those remaining are unique in that they all somehow stumbled upon mechanisms to get fishermen fishing. The non-surviving societies that failed to get fishermen fishing died out, changed their practices, joined the successful societies, or were conquered by them. But even if there were no alternative non-surviving societies, the one we observe survived because it overcame all existential threats. In this view, the reason the Islander practices exist is because they happened upon a solution to the fishing problem.

But this explanation is missing some realism. Although it violates Elster’s criteria, the second solution suggests it is reasonable to allow for some intentionality. Perhaps after some trial-and-error process, someone noticed that certain practices produced desirable effects: they really *did* get people to venture with confidence out to sea. Once the effect was noticed (violating criterion four), the practice

⁵¹⁷ Stinchcombe, *Constructing*, 82.

was encouraged (violating criterion three) because its beneficial effects were clear to people. It was observed that not doing so put the community at risk. Elster argues that the effects must be both unintended and unrecognized, but one generation might have recognized an effect that the next was ignorant of.⁵¹⁸ To take a previous example, a foundational member of the cult might have at some point understood the beneficial effects of isolationist practices, even if it became standard operating dogma for later generations. Here we temporarily relax Elster's third and fourth conditions, but *only to ultimately re-establish them* for a subsequent generation.

Thus, scholars adopting the racial capitalism framework have two ways to go if they aim to establish a functionalist explanation for racist practices in capitalist societies. The first approach posits a series of counterfactual societies that did not have pervasive racism, were unstable, and did not survive. The total system that did in fact survive did so because of the stabilizing effects of its racism. Early forms of American capitalism were deeply hierarchical and exploitative, and only those with sufficiently divided working populations would be stable. This approach mimics the functional explanation of cult isolationism. The second approach embraces some degree of intentionality. It may turn out that functional explanations of racism at the system level really do require this kind of treatment. Perhaps it became clear to some shrewd colonial elites that after Bacon's Rebellion, say, some means of dividing African and British laborers would be required to stabilize the exploitative relations on which the success of the colony depended. Once racial divisions were set in place – clear differences in servants' rights according to broad categories of parentage rather than, e.g., religious group membership or specific national origin; harsh punishments for intermarriage between these categories; and so on – they had an objective effect of providing stability, which over time might have become entirely unrecognized by its

⁵¹⁸ See also Berger and Luckmann (1966) on institutionalization and "sedimentation" in social life (63-67).

beneficiaries. In this weaker but more plausible variant, the selection mechanism impacts the feature, i.e., the reproduction or erosion of racist practices, rather than working by the survival or failure of whole societies.

2.2. A menu of forms of explanation of the race-class interconnection

So far, I have posed the possibility of a “strong” functionalist explanation, in which not only the basic conditions implied in Figure 9 are met – capitalism has a stability problem, racism has the effect of solving that problem, and that effect drives a process that “selects” or reproduces racism that runs through capitalist class relations – but *also* the structure-stabilizing effects of racism are unintended and unrecognized by its beneficiaries. I have also posed a weaker, more plausible functionalist explanation that relaxes these latter assumptions, which argues that some intentionality is permissible. In part, this might be justified by the notion that what is really key in functional explanation is not the *origin* of some behavior or structure, but its *reproduction* over time while others erode. When useful behaviors become institutionalized across generations and their provenance obscured in the fog of time, the process of reproduction may still meet some unintentionality and non-recognition criteria.⁵¹⁹ Besides which, even if actors seek intentionally to sustain some behaviors recognizing *that* they work, even if they do not know *why* they work – think of the Trobriand Islanders, again – the hard core of a functionalist explanation is still there. The analyst will just have to cite Stinchcombe rather than Elster.

Yet not all historical cases of interest for an elaboration of the racial capitalism framework, including this one, will meet all these criteria, for a variety of reasons: changing conditions may render racism non-functional or dysfunctional from the perspective of capitalist class relations; it might be

⁵¹⁹ And, of course, a *sine qua non* of the effectiveness of race as an ideology is precisely that it covers its tracks as an historical and cultural construction.

found in other cases that there is a highly intentional process of reproduction at work; finally there might be cases in which there is no selection process as such that operates through capitalist class relations, or in the which the research design simply cannot register them. In short, we might think of varieties of explanation for the race-class interconnection that represent different configurations of answers to three questions: (1) Who, if anyone, benefits from the effects of racism? (2) What is the process whereby racism is produced and reproduced – by which actors, through what means? (3) How, if at all, do the effects of racism on capitalism act as causes of its own reproduction? Respectively, these questions deal with the functional status of racism, the intentionality of the actors producing it, and whether there is a structural selection mechanism.

Along these lines, Figure 10 proposes a menu of types of explanation of the race-class linkage.⁵²⁰

	FUNCTIONAL FOR CAPITALISM	UNINTENTIONAL REPRODUCTION PROCESS	SELECTION MECHANISM
Strong functionalism	•	•	•
Weak functionalism	•		•
Structural correspondence	•	•	
Dysfunctional reproduction		•	
Intentional- strategic	•		
Intentional- irrational			

Figure 8: Schema of forms of explanations of the race-class linkage based on functionalist criteria.

⁵²⁰ Two notes about this table. First, I reemphasize that it is a schematic rendering, and as such it does not account for more complex sorts of functionality. It is possible that the conditions required to maintain some functional structure undermine the conditions required to maintain another, for instance – the problem of *contradictory* functionality. Claus Offe's (1984) arguments regarding the legitimation and accumulation functions of the capitalist state are an example. Second, two configurations are missing from the table: ($\emptyset \emptyset \bullet$) and ($\emptyset \bullet \bullet$). I leave out these configurations because the idea of the feedback loop structure of the selection mechanism requires a beneficial effect; or, at any rate, a dysfunctional selection feedback loop would mean that there would be no system of racial capitalism to analyze, because it would have self-destructed or been absorbed by some other system.

Strong functionalism is distinguished from weak functionalism, again, by its adherence to Elster's strict criteria around unintentionality; weak functionalism allows for some intentionality, as long as the effects enter back into the causal process through some structural selection mechanism. Structural correspondence would describe a scenario in which capitalists do happen to benefit by racial division, but it is not intentionally reproduced by them and there is no identifiable mechanism creating a feedback loop between the effects of racial division and its reproduction, which instead takes place through ordinary, non-functionalist causal processes. Some influential work in the whiteness studies tradition (e.g., Roediger) seems to take this form, at least from the point of view of capitalists. Capitalists certainly are better off when workers, instead of prioritizing their class identity and class interests, cling jealously to their racial status and go to great lengths to separate themselves socially from other workers, or clamor to "become white" rather than organized as a class. But it is the workers who do the clinging and clamoring, driven not by some basic feature of capitalist class relations as such but by concerns about status and citizenship; from capitalists' perspective, this is just a bit of serendipity.

To understand dysfunctional reproduction, imagine the following scenario. Say that racism was once beneficial for the stabilization of American capitalism when it depended more heavily on enormous supplies of cheap and vulnerable agricultural and industrial labor, but that the course of development of the United States has caused it to require proportionately much more highly skilled, credentialed, and professional forms of labor. Racism in this case might actually tend to artificially restrict the supply of this kind of labor by erecting extraordinary and arbitrary barriers to education and skill acquisition for millions of non-white people. It might further be argued that ongoing racial inequalities increase the likelihood of political disorders which pose serious uncertainties for capitalists, and also represent more quotidian costs in terms of the general maintenance of social order as a matter of course. Perhaps

racism is dysfunctional, then, because it tends in the long term to lock in a path of capitalist development that is both less politically stable and less profitable.

If this counterfactual is right, then a functionalist explanation is clearly out of order. Under these conditions, what could possibly account for the reproduction of racial inequality? What processes at work have got us stuck with a *dysfunctional* phenomenon? This form of explanation for racism-capitalism connection would posit that racial division persists as an *unintended* and *dysfunctional* consequence of ordinary dynamics of capitalist class relations. Perhaps there is something about capitalists' accumulation strategies and workers' wage-seeking strategies that tend to make existing racial divisions stable, even if they are dysfunctional.

An instance of the intentional-strategic form of explanation might be the garden-variety divide-and-conquer mechanism – capitalists anticipate that the effect of racial division will be enhanced management of their own firm and enhanced profits, so they take deliberate steps to produce or reinforce racial division to get the expected benefit. They know precisely what they are doing and are fully aware of the relationship between their actions and their effects. Note however that to the extent that racial-dividing firms drive out non-racial-dividing firms from the market, there *is* a selection mechanism of the same sort described in the example about firm size, and it is closer to a weak functionalism.

Finally, if racial division is dysfunctional, but employers pursue it anyway due to their own racial prejudices, this would be intentional, but irrational. This recalls Becker's argument that, because capitalists acting in a way consistent with maximizing efficiency and profitability would be indifferent to

workers' race, racial preference in hiring simply represents the employers' "taste for discrimination" – they simply prefer to have an all-white workforce even if it is a drag on profits.⁵²¹

This review of forms of explanation pertaining to race and its connection to capitalist class relations may seem like a merely scholastic exercise, but there are real stakes. If racism is reproduced mainly through the intentional actions of powerful groups, in the manner of a divide-and-conquer explanation, then activist strategies for combatting racism might emphasize vigorous and pro-active civil rights law enforcement to catch employers in the act – in other words, simply bring about a stronger enforcement of the existing "rules of the game" of labor markets.⁵²² On the other hand, if racism is reproduced mainly through complex unintentional processes rooted in the rules of the game, but without any selection mechanism at work, then more ambitious policy programs might be necessary in order to discover and correct such processes by changing the rules of the game.⁵²³ Now, if racism can be functionally explained – that is, its effects are beneficial for capitalist class relations, which tend in turn to select for racist practices and social relations – then a strategy for combatting racism implies a transformation of the class structure.

As far as research is concerned, weighing these different forms of explanation allows us to narrow down what it is we should be looking for in our empirical studies of real cases to best

⁵²¹ Becker, *The Economics of Discrimination*.

⁵²² It is ironic that the divide-and-conquer explanation, usually held to be the orthodox Marxist view on race and capitalism, has such a straightforward solution within the "proper channels" of bourgeois politics. All that is needed to seriously upset divide-and-conquer strategies is the aggressive enforcement of existing laws. Political will is clearly a barrier, but here there is no deep structural articulation of racism and capitalism, only employers, real estate agents, and school districts who need to be adequately monitored and sanctioned.

⁵²³ One modest example is the unintentionally discriminatory outcome of hiring through employee referrals. Employees are embedded in racially segregated social networks, information about job openings will travel through these networks, and information about applicants from these networks will travel through current employees to the employer. At no step in the process is there an intent to erect a racial barrier to the open position, but one nevertheless emerges through network phenomena and the practice of filling positions through referrals (see, e.g., DiTomaso 2013). A solution to this problem would not be merely to enforce the rules of the game, but to change the rules – a public policy strictly barring referral-based hiring, for instance.

understand the causal linkage between race and class. If we look for clear and ongoing divide-and-conquer tactics by employers but fail to observe any, we might rule out an intentional explanation of the persistence of race. We might then ask if racial division seems to yield benefits for capitalists; if we observe that it does, we might then begin a search for selection mechanisms connecting those benefits to ongoing racial division.

2.3. Situating the case, again

The conclusions of the case of ILA 815 can be reframed again along these lines. In this work I have emphasized the extent to which the failure of militant interracial solidarity on the Milwaukee waterfront could not be directly understood as an instance of racism *per se*, even if the outcome was the disempowerment of hundreds of black workers and the fixing of the Milwaukee waterfront as one of the lowest-wage employers in the region. Rather than thinking in the typical way about either race or class – in this case, class – having straightforward causal primacy over the other in the explanation of the failure of interracial solidarity in the working class, the case can be thought of instead, in terms of the Figure 9 above, as representing a moment on link *R*, while other cases tend to be moments on link *S*. In terms of the schema in Figure 10, I have emphasized a process of the unintentional reproduction of racial inequality that runs through capitalist class relations – in particular, the vagaries of capitalist competition which ate away at the Lake shipping industry, and the search by the industry's leading firm for higher profits in that context. Neither did the strategies of the local's conservative faction have any racial outcome as among their intended effects. As to who benefited, most of the advantage, of course, went to the stevedores, vessel operators, and warehousemen – the capitalists of the waterfront – in the form of a low wages, continuous and reliable production, and reductions in pilferage.

This case thus most strongly supports an interpretation of a *structural correspondence* between race and class relations, and partially supports a *strong functionalist* explanation since the former nests in the latter, and especially because, unlike in the whiteness example above, the causal path flows through the actions of the beneficiaries (it is closer, in other words, to satisfying Elster's fifth criterion). Because this study concerns a single case, however, little can be said of selection mechanisms per se, which would require a comparative study and better information. A comparison with the Chicago waterfront would be especially revealing. Even the episode with the GLTC is suggestive. Say the Chicago waterfront was *already* characterized by the sort of disempowerment of black labor that would come to define the Milwaukee waterfront after 1942; if that was part of the reason for the GLTC's disinvestment choice to move everything to Chicago and divest from Milwaukee, then there is a selection process here as well. It is similar, again, to the firm size example, operating through the competition between longshoremen across ports. Where big firms are "selected" in a process of competition and elimination wherein firms either lose out to big firms or become big, ports, and their locals, either lost out to Chicago or became like Chicago. Even if this particular selection mechanism is never established, an accumulation of studies demonstrating a strong causal link between capitalist class dynamics and the unintentional reproduction of racism strengthens the basic claim at the heart of the racial capitalism framework.

3. Historical interpretation

Looking back to the question of who benefits, there is no doubt that the transformation of Local 815 was most squarely in line with the interests of employers, but that is not the whole story. Involved in this historical process was also a certain alignment of non-capitalist group interests behind those of the employers: the broader institution of the port, the city of Milwaukee as a whole, the district and

international ILA, the leadership of Local 815, and even the longshoremen themselves. In the event, this could hardly have been clearer; to a rank-and-file longshoreman, whatever sympathies he shared with the radical faction, and however much he savored the power over his foreman afforded him by the radicals' control over hiring, he could hardly avoid the conclusion that losing the power but keeping the work was preferable to losing both.

The leadership of the local, and Brzek in particular, benefited by the increase of his personal power over the distribution of work and the promise of greater stability for the organization as such, which would become especially important to him when he left the waterfront altogether to work as the business agent on a full-time basis in the Fifties. He also received an undeniable elevation of his status compared to previous leadership figures, not least because he had more personal control over the waterfront labor force than any of them had had before, but also because of his business-friendly leadership. He was admired by the port director and the harbor commission for his resolute commitment to the health of the port and honored and flattered by the press and area businessmen for his responsibility and conservatism; where the stevedores once had to deal with a mess of pugnacious stewards and rank-and-filers in a constant day-to-day negotiation, they now dealt primarily with Brzek, and felt themselves heard and their interests carefully considered.

The broader ILA, of course, rid themselves of an insurgent local and won a leadership who would work doggedly to bring business to their port – and thereby dues revenue to the ILA. The port itself also remained a minor source of revenue for the city directly, by the leasing of space and facilities to the various concerns, and more importantly remained a major source of income for the urban

community. Certainly, the city leadership's response to the GLTC's decision to leave the port indicated an extraordinary sense of urgency.⁵²⁴

This alignment is at the core of the formation of what I referred to in the introduction as the anti-communist historic bloc: the specific, concrete political and social formation of American society whereby the stability of capitalist class relations was assured. By the late Thirties its emergence was well underway, a new "consensus" being pieced together under the politics of the New Deal and with countersubversive forces advancing rapidly in influence and control over the institutions of civil society to contain and isolate the left flank. Indeed, even before the GLTC whipped the local into line – rapidly driving this process of material interest-alignment and a retrenchment of class struggle on the waterfront – a return to industrial peace and interclass collaboration was increasingly called for in the language of anticommunism and the Cold War, and assured by the actual repression of Communist and other radical leaders and activists. Thus, while the alignment of interests outlined above served critically as the material basis for the retrenchment of class struggle on the waterfront, this political-ideological moment was also key, and certainly plays a crucial role in Local 815's development.

The rigid anticommunism of the Milwaukee Socialists has been discussed above, but it is worth emphasizing further the extent to which Milwaukee in particular, and Wisconsin more broadly, were hotbeds for the development of anticommunist politics starting in the late Thirties. The strong association of the Communist Party with the CIO in Wisconsin – through big locals with headline-news struggles like UAW Local 248 at Allis-Chalmers in Milwaukee and UAW Local 72 at Nash Motors in Kenosha, as well as through the local and state industrial union councils – produced an increasingly

⁵²⁴ Schenker (1967) estimated that the total direct and secondary income generated by the port in 1963 was about \$64.1 million, roughly two percent of all income received by residents of the Milwaukee statistical metropolitan area that year (137).

widespread conviction that the Party's influence in official state and local politics operated *through* its control of the CIO. This, in turn, contributed to a stiff anticommunist reaction in the labor movement itself, with many locals refusing altogether to affiliate to the Milwaukee or statewide IUCs on the grounds that they were Communist-controlled, and many others trying to identify and marginalize Communist influence from within. What emerged out of these internal conflicts and the municipal Socialist legacy was a tendency of a popular labor-anticommunism, as it were, that strongly articulated countersubversion to liberalism and the politics of the New Deal. In this welter of suspicion and paranoia, Wisconsin became one of only a few states to set up its own "Little Dies" committee; and unlike, for instance, New York's Rapp-Coudert Committee, which investigated Communist influence in the education system and mainly targeted CUNY professors, Wisconsin's committee was aimed squarely at the labor movement.⁵²⁵

This interpretation is broadly consistent with the growing historical literature on the "long civil rights movement", and the case of the Milwaukee longshoremen contributes to the ongoing reassessment of the relationship of the Communist Party and the broader "Old Left" to the black freedom struggle in the Twentieth century. In particular, the period witnessed a rising tide of interracial traditions of civil rights unionism and social democratic politics that co-articulated racial and class demands, thanks primarily to the growing layers of black working-class and intellectual leadership embedded in or allied with labor unions and left-wing organizations. In this light, the case of Local 815

⁵²⁵ On splits and factions around the question of Communist influence, see Ozanne (1984) and Gavett (1965). On anticommunism and the rise of the New Right in Milwaukee, see Connell (2016). On the maligning of the left in other social movement fields, particularly in housing, as well as the broader decline of working class politics in the era, see Fure-Slocum. On other "Little Dies" committees, see, e.g., Stephen Leberstein. "Purging the Profs: The Rapp Coudert Committee in New York, 1940-1942," in Michael E. Brown et al. (eds.), *New Studies in the Politics and Culture of US Communism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1993). The history of Wisconsin's "Little Dies" awaits a study; indeed, Leberstein misses it altogether when he says that Rapp-Coudert was one of only four, the other three being California, Texas, and Oklahoma.

appears as a process played out in microcosm wherein the politics of anticommunism, the routing of the labor movement left, and the disciplining of the labor movement generally disrupted the development of these traditions; in the eras of classical civil rights and black power, the labor organizations that had once been part of the vanguard of anti-racist activity were at best on the periphery in most cases. In Milwaukee, the loss of Local 815 as a militant rank-and-file union contributed, in its own small way, to the severance of broad working-class organizations from the long struggle for freedom.

4. Avenues for future research

These theoretical and historical conclusions must be considered provisional, awaiting additional historical research. Two avenues strike me as especially fruitful.

First, there were at least two other contexts in which militant interracial solidarity probably emerged in Milwaukee: among packinghouse workers in PWOC/UPWA, and among tannery workers in the IFLWU. It is notable that by the Thirties, Milwaukee's once vibrant and massive leather industry had, like Great Lakes shipping, long been in decline. I do not know at all what the situation was for the food processing industry, but certainly LeRoy Johnson, black leader of the Milwaukee PWOC local, had considerable stature in the movement and served on the board of the Wisconsin IUC. Joe Ellis of the Fur and Leather Workers, for his part, was known to be a leader in the Communist Party, and was the main organizer for the CIO's intervention into the growing struggle for housing in that era.

If these were the other main vehicles for militant interracial unionism in the city, then it is significant that no industry in which such a tradition emerged was part of the industrial manufacturing sector. Lake shipping and leather were both on the wane; if this was true as well for the packinghouses, then it is also significant that the places where militant interracial solidarity took root were all places that the course of economic development most immediately threatened. A project investigating these

other unions, and unionism in general in the sectors where black workers were concentrated, could shed light on broader tendencies in Milwaukee's political development – and perhaps even why presently it is one of the most structurally racist places in America, with the deepest levels of segregation and some of the widest disparities across various indicators. Such a study might illuminate, for instance, interesting comparisons in the analysis of civil rights movements in the urban North in the “classical” and black power phases.

Second, instead of situating the Milwaukee waterfront in a wider history of the urban labor movement, another avenue would be to look out across the Great Lakes, comparing other locals to 815's development. It has already been said that it was the only local in the region to win the hiring hall, but that it was not the only racially integrated waterfront workforce. By the Fifties, at least, Local 19 in Chicago was led by a black longshoreman named William Green, and a photograph of longshoremen in Buffalo shows black and white workers in an integrated gang. Along with a study of the Great Lakes sailors – where what little evidence I have suggests there *were* established practices of racial discrimination and outright exclusion – this could serve as a study on the development of interracial unionism at the regional level. Studies of other Great Lakes ports attached to cities with significant black populations – in addition to Chicago and Buffalo, we might also count Cleveland, Toledo, Detroit, Toronto, and others – would make it possible to establish a region-wide summary. They might show that Milwaukee was not so unusual.

At risk of superficial comparison: If the black longshoremen and sailors on the Atlantic and its coasts built and sustained a black Atlantic – a far-flung communication network that enabled the sharing of radical ideas and the formation of an international black identity – could it be that there was a regional analogue, in other words a ‘Black Great Lakes’ connected by the crossing paths of black maritime workers?

As I suggested, black workers *seem* mainly to have not been taken into ship crews, which no doubt would cut off the primary route of inter-port contact. But the evidence is purely conjecture, comprised only of Larrowe's observation, mentioned in Chapter 3, that ship operators handed out anti-Jim Crow pamphlets published by the NMU to their own crews as a strategy to reduce the spread of that union on the lakes. But, as I have shown, the NMU *was* on the lakes, and very friendly to Toliver's longshoremen; in my own research, I even found evidence of a pro-CIO revolt against the AFL among Wisconsin-Michigan Steamship crews. But it is unknown how much inroads the NMU made on the Lakes, or what their own racial policies were. Research on the Great Lakes NMU could go a long way toward the answer of whether there was something like Black Great Lakes – or why such a formation failed to emerge.⁵²⁶

In connection with this as well is the importance of better historical understanding of the Chicago longshoremen. Of course, the competitive attitude among longshoremen toward their counterparts at other ports would probably militate against such an inter-port network; the evident hostility between Local 19 and Local 815 may be a case in point. In short, the particular structure of class relations in the Great Lakes – in concert with a history of racist exclusion by the sailors – shipping may not only have undermined militant interracial unionism in Milwaukee, but also the formation of intra-racial solidarity among black workers in the industry across the region.

⁵²⁶ "Seamen Pick CIO to Do Bargaining," *Milwaukee Journal*, October 29, 1937, p. 41; "Docks Picketed, CIO Says Members Fired," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, November 10, 1938, p. 3; "Who Is Picketing," *Milwaukee Journal*, November 11, 1938, p. 2.

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